

CHRISTIAN COURIER

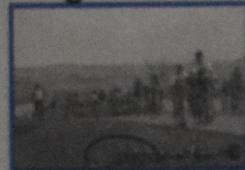
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60th year of publication

UN to establish buffer zone between Israel and Hezbollah

Harry der Nederlanden

After four weeks of intense fighting – and deliberate delays on both sides – at last a ceasefire was hammered out between Israel and Hezbollah. Although (at this writing) it has held, already Hezbollah has balked at the deal the Lebanese government agreed to – and the Lebanese government has compromised.

On Wednesday, August 16, Lebanon deployed its troops across southern Lebanon, several days after the ceasefire went into effect and people had already begun streaming back to their homes. Many, however, were returning to ruins.

At the UN the Israeli foreign minister was urging the UN to see to it that Hezbollah is truly disarmed, as per the ceasefire agreement, and that Iran and Syria are prevented from rearming it. Meanwhile, however, Hezbollah was refusing to disarm and withdraw as long as Israeli troops were still in Lebanon. Lebanese troops in turn refused to move in until the Hezbollah fighters withdrew. And Israel refused to withdraw till UN and Lebanese forces arrived to take over their positions. A stalemate seemed in the offing.

Apparently the Lebanese government reached a compromise with Hezbollah that allows them to keep their weapons caches. This is not an auspicious beginning, for it is contrary to the ceasefire. Mark M. Brown, UN Deputy Secretary-General, speaking on *Newshour*, gave assurances that in the end Hezbollah will be disarmed, but this will be part of a “long-term political process.” Since no one is charged to compel them to disarm, it looks as if Hezbollah must be trusted to disarm voluntarily.

The Moral Compass



THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR Bennett

Joint Lebanese-UN force

According to many reports, Hezbollah is very much in evidence in the south as the people are returning – no longer as a fighting force, but now as a relief organization. Armed now with Iranian cash, it has coopted the government's role in leading reconstruction, doling out generous help and directing cleanup operations. It is obviously seeking to maintain its status as a state within a state.

The 15,000 Lebanese troops moving into the south and the 2,000 UN troops that were already in place as a buffer will be joined – eventually – by another 13,000 UN troops. The latter will work side-by-side with the Lebanese army to enforce the peace. No countries were eager to volunteer for the peacekeeping duty, remembering the UN peacekeepers from the U.S. and France murdered by Hezbollah two decades ago. France, which has long ties with Lebanon, finally agreed to bear the main burden of responsibility, promising to send 4,000 troops and to assume command (later reports indicate France may send only one-

tenth of that number).

One French official remarked that it would take months for France to deploy its contingent of troops, but UN officials were adamant that the process be seen in terms of a couple of weeks. Mark Brown also stressed that the peacekeeping force must include a strong Muslim presence, but not from countries openly hostile to Israel. The UN is expecting Turkey and Indonesia to send troops. Bangladesh has also volunteered troops.

The wording of the ceasefire is quite strong. Only the UN and the Lebanese army will be permitted to carry arms in the area, and the UN troops will be authorized to resist by force anyone who seeks “to prevent it from discharging its duties.” However, it will not be part of its duty to disarm Hezbollah.

So after great loss of life (over 800 Lebanese and 130 Israelis) and huge devastation, the area is back where it was in the 80s, with UN troops occupying a buffer zone between the combatants.

Winners and losers

Many commentators declared

Hezbollah the clear winner, merely for surviving four weeks of intense Israeli attacks. A few, including some Lebanese, considered Israel the victor, for it has achieved a U.N.-backed agreement that will keep Hezbollah back from its northern border. More likely those who say that there are no winners in this war are closer to the truth. But perhaps that is true of any war. It has struck many as a spasm of folly and madness committed by both sides.

Israeli P.M. Ehud Olmert said the Israeli army had delivered “a major blow” to Hezbollah, but the

war has more clearly delivered a major blow to his career. Most Israelis do not see this war as a victory. They expect little good from the UN and anticipate that, given time, Hezbollah will regroup and rearm, and Israel will once again be forced to fight. The consensus in Israel seems to be that Olmert exercised too much restraint and didn't send ground troops in early enough.

Although many Hezbollah fighters have been killed and many Hezbollah weapons destroyed, Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader, See U.N. on page 3 ...

Hezbollah: an Iranian plant

Hezbollah was planted in Lebanon by Iran in 1982 as a party dedicated to the creation of an Islamic republic in Lebanon modeled after the one created in Iran by the Ayatollah. After the expulsion of Arafat's PLO in 1983, it became the main anti-Israeli resistance in Lebanon.

It has been labeled a terrorist organization for good reasons: in the 80's it kidnapped a large number of foreigners, hijacked airplanes and launched several devastating suicide bombings that killed almost 1,000 people. The murder of

241 marines stationed in Lebanon as peacekeepers was committed by Hezbollah. Throughout its history, terror has been its principal weapon. Today it has branches in some 20 countries.

Why, then, do so many Canadian Lebanese protest against this designation? In southern Lebanon Hezbollah has developed into much more than a militia intent on destroying Israel. With funds from See Hezbollah on page 2...



Pictures of
Hezbollah's
leader Sheikh
Nasrallah
are every-
where

News

War crimes and proportionality

Harry der Nederlanden

Commentators in several different publications have accused Israel of "indiscriminate bombing," of deliberately targeting civilians, and of using "disproportionate" force. In fact, when a UN observer post was hit, killing a Canadian soldier, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan lost his cool and charged that the Israeli strike had been deliberate.

Yet, after a day of attacks and bombing with jets, helicopters and tanks, the average number of civilians killed was usually less than 30. That is a lot of wasted human lives and a lot of grief, of course, but if Israel was out to kill as many civilians as possible, surely with its superior weaponry it would be able to kill many, many more. The worst such incident, in the town of Qana, involved the deaths of perhaps 50 civilians.

Canada's Louise Arbour, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, was quick to charge Israel with committing "war crimes" and for failing to observe the "principle of proportionality." She said that leaders could be held responsible not only for the indiscriminate bombing of cities but also for bombing sites "with alleged military significance, but resulting invariably in the killing of innocent civilians." Human Rights Watch and left-wing groups issued similar statements. Critics were taken aback. Has there been any war in recent memory in which cities have not been bombed and civilians have not been killed in attacks on military targets?

In defense of Israel, many pointed to the fact that Hezbollah often hides among the populace and even conceals its rocket launchers in or near civilian housing. This is part and parcel of the tactics of their kind of urban guerrilla warfare. Israel tries hard to limit civilian casualties, argued Alan M. Dershowitz, a prominent lawyer, but if Israel abided by Arbour's supposed rules of war, it would be unable to defend itself against terrorist attacks.

"When terrorists use civilians as human shields," he pointed out, "it is the terrorists who are criminally responsible for the 'foreseeable' deaths of the civilian shields."

Arbour may have missed the criminal law class in which this issue was considered, but Canadian law – like the law of all civilized nations – holds the bank robber, not the policeman guilty of murder, when the robber takes a hostage and the policeman kills the hostage in an effort to stop the robber from shooting at innocent bystanders.

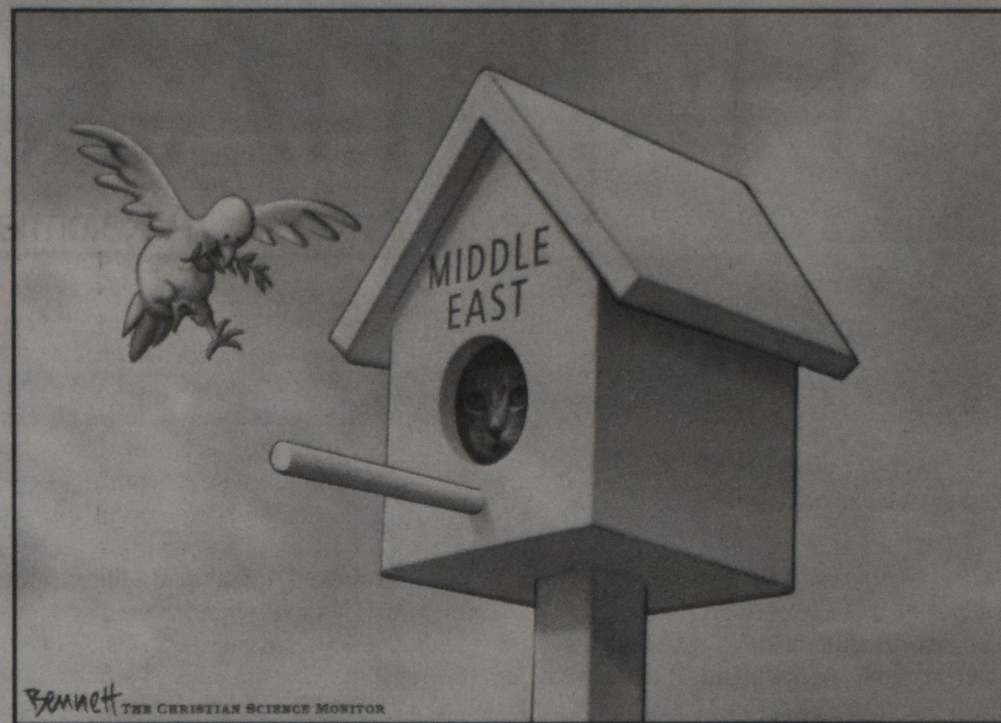
Charles Krauthammer wrote, "Creating human shields is a war crime. It is also a Hezbollah specialty." That was something Arbour forgot to mention, but perhaps she thought Hezbollah wasn't really listening anyway.

The charge of "disproportionality" also spawned a host of critical responses.

Yes, Israel has superior weaponry – jets, helicopters, tanks, etc. – and is therefore able to launch a far more devastating attack than Hezbollah, which for the most part relies on rather primitive rockets and smaller weapons. Technological superiority is precisely what has enabled Israel to survive several previous attacks from its far larger neighbors. But its superior weaponry has also enabled it to be more precise in hitting its targets. Hezbollah, on the other hand, has been "indiscriminately" lobbing rockets at Israeli cities with no attempt at aiming at military targets. No doubt, less mention is made of that by those who set themselves up as our conscience during war because it is seen as the weaker party.

What would proportionality mean exactly? What country, when attacked by an enemy with 50 divisions, mobilizes 50 divisions in response, if it has an army of 200 divisions? What people, when attacked by an enemy that has only bows and arrows, lays aside its guns to wage war with the same weapons? Clearly, a wise general seeks to strike back with superior force and to overwhelm the enemy as quickly as possible, largely because it saves lives – the lives of his own troops primarily. Such is the logic of war.

Nevertheless, most of us probably do feel that the charge of disproportionality



does carry some weight in this instance. To launch a war in response to an attack on a military post seems an extreme reaction. This may be offset to some extent by further background knowledge. Israel knows that Hezbollah is dedicated to its destruction and that Iran has been supplying it with thousands of rockets. It also knows that Hezbollah is acting as a proxy for Iran, which has been growing more aggressive of late, and that the technology available to its enemies is rapidly improving. So there was undoubtedly an element of preemption in Israel's "overreaction".

Still, when we see entire towns, city blocks, apartment buildings, roads and bridges destroyed – to say nothing of the hundreds of lives – we ask, Was this really necessary? The economy of an entire country has been severely damaged, an entire nation victimized, to strike at a criminal group within that country for committing a specific criminal act.

I have in mind here Jim Skillen's argument that fighting terrorism is not really a war but a policing action. There is a certain disproportionality involved in

turning a policing action into a full-scale war. In fact, Israel may have played into Hezbollah's and Iran's hands by doing so.

Some, however, insist that this is no mere local conflict but a battle in a much larger war. In fact, they refer to this larger frame as World War III. A radicalising Muslim world is locked in a battle with a decaying West. The war is being fought in numerous places: sometimes by isolated terrorist groups, by Al Qaeda, by insurgents in Iraq, by the Taliban in Afghanistan, by Hamas and in Lebanon by Hezbollah.

There's more than a smidgen of truth to this scenario, but it's a big framework that clouds more than it illuminates. But wouldn't Israel (and the U.S.) have been better served in this instance if it had dealt with the attack on its border post as a local, criminal matter and addressed it as such? Recall that in the so-called Cold War this prevented a nuclear war. It kept every local confrontation from becoming World War III.

Sometimes it is the better part of wisdom to keep the stage small, not to launch the big war and attempt to achieve a once-and-for-all solution.

Hezbollah ... continued from p.1

Iran, it has displaced the Lebanese state as the provider of services in the south. In fact, it has come to control almost all facets of life there. It owns a huge variety of businesses, from hotels to restaurants. It runs clinics, hospitals and schools – schools which, of course, teach an Islamist curriculum. And it dispenses millions in welfare, especially to widows and orphans.

Even now as the people of the south return, Hezbollah is handing out generous dollops of cash, well before international aid agencies or the Lebanese government can begin to act. Those who were fighters a few days ago are now leading reconstruction and aid.

Estimates to the size of the trained



Beirut street 1983

fighting force range from 2,000 to 10,000 (so it looks like guesswork). But Hezbollah can count on many, many more willing fighters among the Shiite population in the south. Its militia is better armed, and its core better trained, than the Lebanese army. There are, of course, also Shiites in the Lebanese army. It is, thus, hardly

surprising that the government of Lebanon has not moved to disarm Hezbollah and put an end to its existence as a state within a state. It would have resulted in a civil war, and the outcome would have been uncertain.

Many experts believe that Hezbollah is so closely tied to Iran that it is highly unlikely that it undertook the raid that sparked this conflict without Iran's prior approval. This may help explain the initial silence in the Arab world when Israel struck back. While Hezbollah and Iran are Shiite, most of the rest of the Arab world is Sunni. And the Sunnis are not eager to see Iran gain dominance in the region. Militant Shiites and Sunnis have killed many more of each other than they have non-Muslims.

Politics

Baby steps and giant leaps

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

When I was invited to visit Rocky Christian School in Rocky Mountain House, Alberta, for three days to share my stories, dramas, and nonfiction articles with the students, the principal informed me of the school's theme for the year: "Everywhere I go I see You!"

The theme took on particular significance as I prepared for the workshops – deciding on which stories to read to each age group, reading the stories aloud, formulating writing assignments, determining which dramas would be most suitable to teach, and choosing age-appropriate parenting articles and news stories to explore – and readied myself spiritually.

In the two and a half weeks that I had to plan for the visit, I jotted down in my daily devotional journal the many ways I saw God's hand at work helping me to take on what at first was a frightening challenge. Although I had read to students in schools in my home province of Ontario, sometimes for a day or just a few hours, I had never led workshops for three days or travelled that far to do so. Day by day I discovered again – this wasn't the first challenge I'd faced! – that God takes seemingly impossible things and makes them reality. As the apostle Paul said, God "is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine" (Ephesians 3:20). Because God knows how weak we are, he helps us take baby steps to prepare us for giant leaps. In other words, despite our fears and feelings of inadequacy, he gets us to the place where he wants us to serve him.

I'm convinced that God has a sense of irony because the day I heard about the invitation I had just performed in a drama I wrote for the Coffee Break women's Bible study group in my church. The drama's title, "What Time Is It?" was based on Psalm 31:14-15a: "I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands." At the end of the drama another participant and I had given each woman in the audience a bookmark printed with the psalmist's words. We greeted each one by name and added, "Your times are in God's hands." Proclaiming that truth to women who had recently lost a spouse, a father, a mother-in-law, or grandchild, or who were struggling emotionally or physically was an intense, yet grace-filled, experience.

As I fought my rising anxiety at the thought of visiting Rocky Christian School, I reminded myself that nothing happens by chance in God's great scheme of events. I remembered that in the hours that I had spent writing the drama, practising performing it, and in the actual performance, God had prepared me to step out in faith, believing that my times are in his hands.

Still, I struggled with fear. But God helped me to overcome anxiety through Scripture passages, devotional readings, an encouraging card, a saying on a church's sign, a line from a hymn, and the prayers of friends and family. Allow me to relate some of the ways in which he abundantly poured out his grace on me.

I read the prophet Jeremiah's words with a renewed conviction of their truth for my life: "I know, O Lord, that a man's life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps" (Jeremiah 10:23). Of course I knew that was true, but I needed to assimilate it more profoundly into my walk with God.

Two devotional readings, both from Oswald Chamber's *My Utmost for His Highest*, challenged me. In the first, Chambers expounds on Exodus 3 when God appears to Moses in the burning bush and assigns him the daunting and seemingly impossible task of going to Pharaoh and bringing the Israelites out of Egypt. Chambers

writes: "We have no choice in what we want to do, whatever God's program may be, we are there, ready. . . . Be ready for the sudden surprise visits of God." Consistently I had prayed to God to open doors of service for me, especially ones related to my passion for writing. When he surprised me by allowing me to go to Rocky Christian School, how could I be afraid?

In another devotional based on John 14, Chambers writes: "Let not your hearts be troubled" – then am I hurting Jesus by allowing my heart to be troubled? If I believe the character of Jesus, am I living up to my belief? Am I allowing anything to perturb my heart, any morbid questions to come in? I have to get to the implicit relationship that takes everything as it comes from him. God never guides presently, but always now. Realize that the Lord is here now, and the emancipation is immediate" (Barbour Publishing Inc., 1963).

Besides encouraging me with Scripture and devotional material, God overcame my fears through a friend's card which mentioned pertinent Scripture passages and quoted the following proverb: "Boats are safe anchored in the harbour, but that's not what boats are made for." I had to admit to myself and to God that I enjoyed being in the harbour of familiar routines and experiences, but I realized that he wanted to send me out to sea and teach me to trust that he would provide for me.

Fear is related to feelings of inadequacy. God knew I was wondering if I was a capable enough writer to take on the task and if I could adequately motivate the students. So, when I saw Grace Anglican Church's sign, I burst out laughing. It read: "If you think you're too small to have an impact, try going to sleep with a mosquito in the room." In my heart I said, "I hear you, Lord! I hear you!"

A few months prior to receiving the invitation, I had attended a worship symposium. One line from the hymn, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty," pierced me: "Ponder anew what the Almighty can do as with his love he befriends you" (Psalter Hymnal, CRC Publications, 1989, #253). On several other occasions soon afterwards, I sang the words or the Holy Spirit reminded me of them. The line kept popping into my mind as I anticipated going to Rocky Mountain House. How could I be afraid when the Almighty had befriended me in love and compassion? All his purposes for me would be good. I could be assured of that. What I needed to do was ponder and anticipate what he had in store for me.

A quote I discovered in Elizabeth Steele Halstead's *Visuals for Worship* captures the process I underwent: "Our fear becomes awe. We rest, assured that the Spirit is moving in this place" (Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2006, pp.42). My fear became awe; my trepidation became praise. In confident rest, I was filled with joy, anticipation, and boldness.

Everything about the visit – the interaction with staff and students, the hospitable family I billeted with, and much more besides – filled me with gratitude to God. The school's theme rang true for me – "Everywhere I go I see You!"



UN checkpoint before hostilities

U.N. ... continued from page 1

emerged a great Arab hero, boasting of his militia's "historic, strategic victory" over mighty Israel.

Muhammed Khatami, the former president of Iran, called Hezbollah "the sun of Islam shining on the universe," and Syria spoke of Hezbollah's "glorious battle." Simply by surviving the Israeli onslaught, Hezbollah has greatly enhanced its prestige and influence in the region. While Hezbollah is crowing and glowing, Israel is dejected and engaged in critical self-examination.

To achieve its goals, Israel had to destroy a significant part of Hezbollah and its weapons, and to do so in a short time without casing a lot of civilian casualties. It was quite confident of its ability to force a decisive change on its northern border, either by largely destroying Hezbollah or by making Lebanon realize that it could not allow Hezbollah to continue in the south as a state within a state. It did not succeed.

Initially many Lebanese may have bought Condoleezza Rice's line that Israel's invasion was to Lebanon's good – to help it establish sovereignty over its own territory. In fact, at first the anger of non-Shiite Lebanese was directed against Hezbollah, as was the anger of the Saudis, Egyptians and Jordanians, but that changed when they saw the devastation being visited on the country by Israel. By now most of the anger in the region is directed against Israel and America, and hardly anyone dares to raise his voice against Hezbollah.

Since Hezbollah has emerged from this conflict with enhanced status, the Lebanese government has correspondingly lost influence in the country, the opposite of the outcome hoped for. The Israeli policy of unilateral withdrawal has been demonstrated a failure. Syria and Iran have learned that there is much to gain by fighting wars indirectly through unofficial militias rather than directly. The technological superiority of Israel (and the U.S.) has been shown to have an Achilles heel, for a democratic nation with ethical compunctions cannot deploy its full fire power against an enemy ensconced among civilians.

It is to be hoped that instead of continuing to idolize Hezbollah, the Lebanese will come to their senses and decide that it bears a good share of the blame for ruining the country's recovery. What will happen, however, if Hezbollah is forced to move further north? Will its brand of Islam be imposed in Beirut and other cities? Will increasing numbers of non-Islamic Lebanese emigrate in search of a more secure future elsewhere? This war may well alter the face of the country and undermine the so-called Cedar Revolution.

This ill-advised war may well serve to bolster the influence of radical Islam, not just in Lebanon, but also in other parts of the Middle East.

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WPI 100

Editorial

Work and war, swords and ploughs

Harry der Nederlanden

In this issue you'll find a double dose of our "Reflections" column – Marian and Bert in the same issue. Bert has been rambling all summer. But his van broke down in Grand Rapids, so he grumbled rather than rambled while he waited for replacement parts. That gave him a lot of time to read the papers, but he sent in his column too late for the previous issue. It was too topical to save till the next, so we gave Bert the "Letters" page.

Vicky van Anandel's commentary on the women-in-office issue was supposed to have been printed in the previous issue, but it got lost in the shuffle as we rearranged articles. So I include it here as a guest editorial.

Since this issue appears shortly before Labor Day, I wanted to include something about work, but Ragbrai took up more space than I'd figured on. With all the depressing articles on the Middle East, I thought we needed something light in the middle pages, and what can be lighter than someone zipping along on two wheels? Until you come to the tenth hill, of course.

As I was reflecting on the theme of labor and my head was still roiling with the dozens of articles that I've been reading about the Middle East, in my files I stumbled across an old article by Paul Marshall on the theme of work. It appeared in a 1988 issue of *The Reformed Journal*.

In his reflections, titled "Rest and Work," Marshall makes the point that the so-called "cultural mandate" is not something God thought up for human beings to do after he created them. No, by creating them in his image, in the image of the Creator, he endowed them with a nature that is at the same time a task. He makes them *shapers of history*. So history is not a sort of second story perched on top of an inert creation or nature. Creation was designed to be unfolded by us as God's image-bearers. It is our participation in God's creational purpose.

Marshall goes on to point out that not just some kinds of work are holy, not just certain vocations are part of God's Kingdom, but that somehow all human labor is allowed to participate in this total renewal of fallen creation. Human labor extends into the New Heaven and the New Earth: "When we read that 'they will beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks' (Mic. 4:35), we should remember not only the destruction of implements for war but also the (new) creation of implements for work."

The Micah passage brings together in a sort of continuity work and war, tools for killing and tools for cultivating. When we as God's workers assume the awesome, creative task of

unfolding all the rich potential this earth contains for human life lived before the face of God, we assume huge powers. It is not a single power of course, but a diversity of powers.

Our mandate involves agriculture and ecology, of course. But it also involves art and learning. And in many ways it reaches its epitome in politics, for politics gives shape to the human community that embraces this huge task and deploys it. It is human power exercised over humans and their various powers. Even the pagans recognized the godlike power of those who govern, often combining the functions of king and priest in one.

As transformationalists, Reformed folk are very aware of this all-embracing, total task implicit in being followers of Jesus Christ. And it is not just the Enlightenment that often causes this calling to go to our heads, filling us with the illusion that we can seize this creation, this history, this political order and forcefully fashion it according to our latest idea of what justice and equality demands. Humans have done that since they stepped out of the garden

When we do that, our plows and pruning hooks, our sciences technologies, even our pens, are turned into weapons. It doesn't take much to transform transforming work into war, to turn ploughs into swords.

But God promises in the end to turn the implements of war back into implements of wholesome, rather than totalitarian, transformation. Anticipating that great transformation, again and again we become impatient, and, like Abraham, we attempt to make God's promises come true when he seems to be flagging. That's when we end up with wars.

Of course, notice that Micah doesn't tell us to beat our swords into ploughshares now. We still need swords, and it is seldom easy to judge when to drop our plows and pick up our swords. It takes the judgment and the wisdom of God. But Scripture promises that if we ask for it, God also shares his wisdom with us. Pray for an extra measure of that wisdom that we all may be transformed to do our work of transformation so the earth may no more be ploughed with bombs and fertilized with blood.

A long road

Vicky van Anandel

The decisions of Synod 2006 on the role of women in the church don't line up. On the one hand the Christian Reformed Church officially declared all ordained offices open to women (and is changing the church order to reflect that; to be ratified next year), and on the other, it decided to continue to bar women from serving as voting delegates at the annual synodical meetings. These two decisions are not compatible. On top of that, Synod approved a sabbath's rest from the discussion on women for seven years.

There are several issues here. First, synod gave the church a mixed message. The overriding one is that it wants to include women, but not all the way. This compromise is deplorable because it treats women as objects, to make decisions for and about. Women are clearly not objects. Women are responsible human beings created in the image of God. They make their own decisions and take their own responsibilities. A compromise is not possible when it comes to the identity, expression, responsibility and accountability of women. This decision has reduced women to an inferior role in life to men. Therefore, it cannot possibly be inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is a human decision about roles, customs and traditions; a decision made under the umbrella of human patriarchy rather than the overarching rainbow of God's grace.

Patriarchy is so pervasive and subtle that, even after all the discussions about women in our society and the church, many of us still don't recognize it. We have a need to hold on to hierarchical power structures to keep the comfortable customs and traditions in place. To give up patriarchy means to open ourselves up to change. Major change, because our world is turned upside-down. We start looking at life with new eyes, to see things we never saw before. We become aware of equal power and opportunities for all people.

The committee members were clearly not aware of this. They did not recognize powers of patriarchy at work in their discussions on the role of women. And so they succumbed to old ways. They used power in two ways: by deciding not to allow women to serve as voting delegates to synod and by deciding not to talk about it again for seven years. As a result, women once again, have to pay the price.

Personal points of views, from the perspective of the members on the committee assigned to the women issue, also appear to have played a major role in the compromise proposal. This is not surprising because the church itself is polarized. In polarized situations, a compromise solution

can be an effective way to solve problems. Except in this case. Women cannot be classified as a problem to solve. Women are whole spiritual human beings, bearing God's image. They are equal to men. There is no compromise to be made when it comes to women, who they are, and how they can express their faith in God.

Therefore, a man-made compromise about women, and how they are to respond to their calling to serve God, is not acceptable. Women choose their own calling. As long as women are prevented from doing so, they are compelled to rise up and speak out.

A major reason for a compromise solution was to keep the church united.

But while the church may appear united, in reality it is not. The younger generations may say little, but their actions mean a lot. I listened to a number of people discussing synod's decision. One woman with two grown daughters expressed her sadness: "My girls are taking distance from the church. They just can't relate to discussions about what women may or may not do. It makes me want to leave the church."

I am sad too. Women have only one life to live. Their lost years in the church can never be retrieved. Women need to create a better future. The injustice done to women is harming them. Lewis Smedes in his book *Forgive and Forget* notes that people who have been deeply hurt have no choice but to travel the journey of forgiveness. The alternative is to lead a life of bitterness. Smedes also says that to forgive does not simply mean to just forget. Forgiveness means first of all, to become fully aware of the extent of the harm that was done, and then to creatively work towards a better future. In striving towards a better future, a harmed person is blessed in learning to forget the harm of the past.

Women are very aware of the harm done to them. They feel it all the time. And so, women are forced to create a better future. They work at it by advocating, talking and writing. Women are extremely resourceful. Their many difficult years of striving for equality and justice has taught them much. What are the men doing? What have they learned? Are they aware of the harm they have done? Do they know of the deep inner conflicts women are forced to experience and resolve?

I worry about the journey of forgiveness I keep having to travel. It is a long road, and it appears endless. I am weary.

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Canada

Commentary

A lengthy struggle for our hearts and minds... and bodies

Bert Witvoet

While Alice and I were on vacation in Western Canada, Hezbollah attacked Israel, and Israel struck back and eventually invaded southern Lebanon. The result – hundreds of casualties and thousands of displaced persons and families. This is not a pleasant background against which to relax and recreate oneself. One could, of course, shut out the world and not read newspapers and listen to broadcasts, but that is hard to do for Alice and myself. With John Donne, we say, "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main... any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind."

I realize that there will never be a time period during which no suffering and violence takes place in our world. Most of it goes unreported and provides a convenient trouble-free window for vacations. But this time the newspapers were filled with reports and comments on a part of the world that never fails to rouse strong feelings all around. How is it that a small nation like Israel is constantly in the news?

A complex history

I, too, felt pulled into the debate about the rights and wrongs of this serious fight between Hezbollah and Israel, with the poor Lebanese caught in the middle. I empathize with Michael Ignatieff, who was accused by fellow Liberal contenders for the leadership of the party of being slow to come to a position on the Middle East crisis. The issue is very complex and there just are no innocent parties when you look at the larger historical struggle between the Jews and the Arabs, the Western nations and Islam. There is so much to take into consideration.

If you take the short view of the immediate situation, Israel is in the right because it was attacked. Israel is a full member of the United Nations and by international law has a right to defend itself. The accusation of disproportionate response is hard to make when you know that Israel's enemies have only one goal: the destruction of the state of Israel and the decline of the Western world.

But in the back of my mind is always that nagging question: What right did the United Nations have to hand over 60 percent of Palestine to the Jewish people who in 1903 made up only 3 percent of the population and in 1948 barely 15 percent? Sixty years is not a long time to address historical injustices. At the same time, how can the world untie this Gordian knot? How can history be reversed without doing untold damage? What choice do we have but to consider what happened in 1948 irreversible? The state of Israel is a reality that must be acknowledged. To refuse to do so is probably going against God's will. Besides, there are no national boundaries that could not be disputed because of some historical wrong committed some time in the past.

Anti-revolutionary position

No, I'm not on side with those Christians who support Israel because they see what is

happening in the Middle East as a fulfillment of biblical prophecy. It probably is, but we have no business to further the fulfillment of biblical prophecy nor to approve of unjust measures that end up fulfilling such prophecy. To use a Dutch expression, God can use "a crooked stick to hit straight," but that does not give us the right to be the crooked stick. Besides, we should not favor Israelis over Palestinians. God loves them both, and we have no obligation to make an a-priori choice of one over the other. My acceptance of the right of Israel to exist today as a nation is in line with the anti-revolutionary principles which 19th-century Dutch statesman Groen Van Prinsterer espoused.

The revolutionary mindset of Islamic terrorists, for example, is conceived in hatred against God and humanity, is self-destructive and ends up destroying so much else. It's for the same reasons that Groen Van Prinsterer rejected the French revolutionary principles, which were also conceived in hatred against God and humanity (*ni dieu, ni maitre*), although it proclaimed itself to be the voice of liberty, fraternity and equality. There is so much in our own society today that proclaims to be such a voice of freedom, solidarity and equality, but in essence rejects God and our fellow image bearers of God. Our first loyalty and solidarity has to be with God, and then with people, who must be helped in their task to reflect God and do his loving will. If this sounds inhumane, it is because we no longer understand where our happiness lies.

A bleak outlook

So I'm looking at recent developments in the Middle East and conclude that Israel has the right to go hard against Hezbollah. The fact that Lebanese non-militants also suffer the consequences is terrible but must be blamed on Hezbollah and its inhumane and unscrupulous practices of using civilians as shields. Minister Peter Mackay is right in saying that Hezbollah is a cancer on Lebanese society, and that Israel has no choice but to try to eradicate that cancer. To try appeasement with Islamic fascists is either evil or naïve.

Not that I'm optimistic about the long-term outcome of this struggle. The fighting will continue and worsen as time goes on. (At the time that I am putting the finishing touches on this column, England has arrested 24 young Muslims who had formed a terrorist ring that was ready to blow up ten planes leaving Heathrow Airport for the United States.) The recent fighting between Israel and Hezbollah may well end up in a major battle between East and West.

A ceasefire monitored by the UN will not effectively solve the problem, unless the UN gets serious about battling terrorists and fanatics like Hamas and Hezbollah. But seeing how the UN is made up of a number of power blocs that are at odds with each other, and seeing that many of its member countries have no respect for the rule of law and justice, and most Arab and Muslim nations hate the West, one cannot expect much from that body

in terms of world peace and world justice.

Satan is the enemy

The major stumbling block to a lasting peace is the growth of radical Islam but also the lack of spiritual and moral fibre in the West. I'm appalled at how appeasement is back in fashion today and how gullible the West is about the evil of revolutionary zealotry (as an indication of the hypocrisy of modern nations, see a selection at the side from the article: "The Jerusalem Syndrome"). It's a clear indication of the bankruptcy of unbelief or false belief. There are no physical weapons that can overthrow those forces. All of them carry the hallmark of Satan, the Great Deceiver and the Father of Lies. It's ultimately a spiritual battle for the hearts and minds of all people. That's why the Church must continue to preach the gospel of reconciliation, and Christians must stand boldly against the idolatries of societies that refuse to bend their knees to the one true God.

We must be beacons of light and hope, emissaries of love (tough love sometimes) and justice. I know deep in my heart that everything that we see happen today in our world will bring us all to a divinely appointed end. So through it all, we must keep looking for the coming of the Kingdom of Peace and Justice, and live by its rules.

The Jerusalem Syndrome

André Glucksmann on reactions to the war in Lebanon: From surrealistic geopolitics to apocalyptic delusion.

The outrage of so many outraged people outrages me. On the scales of world opinion, some Muslim corpses are light as a feather, and others weigh tons. Two measures, two weights. The daily terrorist attacks on civilians in Baghdad, killing 50 people or more, are checked off in reports under the heading of miscellaneous, while the bomb that took 28 lives in Qana is denounced as a crime against humanity.... Why do the 200,000 slaughtered Muslims of Darfur not arouse even half a quarter of the fury caused by 200-times fewer dead in Lebanon.... The Security Council does not hold meeting after meeting, and the Organization of Islamic States piously averts its eyes. From that we may conclude that the world is appalled only when a Muslim is killed by Israelis.... Every truce along the Jordan is fleeting, as long as the palaces and streets, the majority of the intelligentsia and the officials of the Muslim world hang on to their anti-western passion.



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Ethics

Afghanistan: from good intentions to sustainable solutions

Ernie Regehr

If good intentions and serious effort were what it takes, Afghanistan would be a peaceful democracy today, but war on the Taliban regime starting in 2001, followed by a half decade of security, democratization, and reconstruction effort, has left a frayed and fading vision of sustainable peace.

When citizens of Kabul rioted in the streets in June 2006, it was not only out of anger at an out-of-control American military truck

that had smashed into a row of cars killing several people. They were also giving voice to their own dashed hopes. Elections, humanitarian programs, the prominent presence of foreign troops, and a growing toll in military and civilian lives have not produced the political inclusion, jobs, housing, services, or security Afghans were expecting.

In Canada, echoes of those fading hopes are heard through growing doubts about the effec-

tiveness of Canada's military-centric Afghanistan mission. Are the tragic sacrifices of Canadians leading toward a defined and achievable outcome? Gwynne Dyer describes current international military efforts there as just one more installment in a series of failed "foreign invasions," all of which were "doomed to fail."

In the Spring issue of *The Ploughshares Monitor* we already noted the broad assessment that the security situation in Afghanistan

was steadily deteriorating, and since then that trend has continued. In a sense, the real surprise would be if recovery from decades of war and attempts to implement the ambitious Afghanistan Compact were accomplished without a hitch in a matter of a few years.

Significant set-backs in the short term are a given, the question is, will these set-backs be a spur to more effective effort or simply lead to the conclusion that in Afghanistan good governance ambitions have to be

permanently abandoned in favour of a series of temporarily expedient and shifting protection contracts with an assortment of armed war lords, drug barons, gangsters, and criminals – an outcome that Dyer does not prescribe, but does predict.

There is no virtue in abandoning good intentions; neither is there virtue in persisting in efforts that are demonstrably failing. The President of CARE Canada put it succinctly: "The truth is that our strategy for reconstituting failed states – military intervention followed by democratic elections – is failing. As former Foreign Minister Axworthy put it in the wake of the deaths of four more Canadian soldiers, the Afghan mission was to be a careful mix of diplomacy, development, and defence – portrayed as a 3-D approach – but "now it has become one big 'D'."

A thorough re-evaluation of Canada's role and objectives in Afghanistan is long overdue. This summer's transfer of the command of security operations in the Kandahar region from the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) to the UN-mandated and NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was the time for a thorough review of the military operation, but at the time Canadian military officials were insisting that the changes would have no impact on the way forces in the region would operate. Defence Minister Gordon O'Connor, in response to questions from the NDP's Dawn Black, made the same point in the House in the debate before the May 17 vote: "There will not be one iota of change except that we will be under NATO command instead of Enduring Freedom. Nothing will change. We are following the same tactics. We are following NATO tactics."

But, if the ISAF and OEF roles and tactics are indeed identical, why bother with ISAF in the first place?

The Parliamentary debate and resolution earlier this year, despite the best efforts of some Members of Parliament, did not constitute a thorough review and did not settle anything about Canadian involvement. The vote in support of a two-year extension of Canada's military commitment was not a binding decision (the vote was advisory) and it certainly didn't answer questions about the effectiveness of that deployment.

The ladder and the cross

I was told the story of a philosophy professor at Brock University who began his introductory course with one question: What does it mean to be alive? One student, responded enthusiastically, stating that the purpose of life was to make as much money as possible in order to buy everything he wanted: sports cars, cottages on the lake, and a boat to dwarf it. The student smiled confidently as he spoke, looking at his peers, knowing he had the right answer.

This is the season of the year where students set their sights for the future. Classes begin, and dreams are ignited. I believe that the imagination of a student, and let us say a Christian student in particular, may rest on one of two things: a ladder or a cross. The image that dominates determines vast stretches of the student's unfolding life.

Climbing the ladder of success

The ladder has been named more directly as "the corporate ladder" or "the ladder of success." The student imagines learning as a means of going "up", and each course, each degree brings them one rung closer to their destiny – or should I say *fortune*, as the gods of the job market are very capricious. The student is "career oriented" and is usually driven by a competitive streak or by the ambition that seeks the envious rewards that lie "at the top." Sometimes parents anxiously cajole their children to aspire to practical, well-paid middle-class occupations, fearing that they otherwise might not "make it."

Universities know this spirit, and so they have adopted slogans like "Your Career Begins Here" or "The Degree that Works" or "Major in Yourself" – with the hopes of attracting students that want to move up this virtual ladder. The learning experience is reduced to the pursuit of a prize, a ticket to a preferred career, and "career", it may be noted, comes from the Latin word for "race." Education in this mindset is a mad scramble for credentials, status, and power.

Here is the picture: the student puts the ladder in place against the academic mountain of their own choosing, casts a calculated look across at their peers, and races for the top, as fast as possible, in order to conquer for themselves the discipline in question. Their parents, grandparents and even church friends cheer from the sidelines, proud of their ascending leader. Then the student finally plants their flag at the top and scans the horizon for the next ascent. Unless, of course, the vertigo gets to them, and they stumble, tired and dizzy, into the jungle below, to the disappointment of all who had hoped they would "make it."

Picking up a cross

"Take up your cross and follow me," said Christ. This image suggests anything but a race. Carrying a cross means being weighed down with a heavy burden, being encumbered with something not your own, and moving very, very slowly. This is not the pace of a competition, but the pace of compassion.

I'm not saying that careers per se are inherently evil, and neither is becoming a great leader in a given profession, but that the Christian seeks first the kingdom of God and their calling within that realm. If

they climb a ladder, they carry a cross. That is to say, their heart aches and yearns for a world where the poor are the ones raised up, the creation is treated like a fellow creature of God, and the impractical pursuit of beauty motivates every action. This love, planted by the Spirit of God, slows down the race for status, rewards, and other heights. These things are by-products of a calling rather than the goals of education.

Education becomes a gift, a gift of time to explore the beauty of God's world and the pains which make it groan and writhe. The Christian uses this time to grow in their ability to attend to God's presence in all things and develop a depth of self-awareness before that presence. They seek a calling – a role, a place in which to serve in this greater kingdom rather than to forge a kingdom entirely of their own.

The cross is a symbol of love for the world. I heard about a student (in the 1960s) who loved to read in the college library. They would crack open one book which would arouse curiosity about another book two shelves over and that would take them down a bunny-trail to peek into a third book and so on. They missed classes because this inquisitiveness and wonder burned so deeply in their soul. This is a picture of a love, perhaps even a madness, for learning the mind of God and his designs in this broken world. It may make some parents anxious. It is slow, just as God, too, is slow, although not in the way we usually judge slowness.

Drawn to fire

Yeats said that education is not the filling of a pail, (and we might add, not the attaining of a degree) but the lighting of a fire. It is an opportunity to fan the flames of love for God's designs. One writer on youth says, "Teenagers are heat-seeking missiles. They are drawn to fire. They yearn for experiences that will channel their passions."

How you channel your passions is your spirituality. Spirituality is the practices that shape your life and the habits of your heart. For where your treasure is, there will be your heart, too. Some grasp a ladder, and some pick up the cross.

There once was a king of a great country who heard a voice while he lay in his bed. The voice said, "Ask for anything you want, and I'll give it to you." Instinctively the king knew this was not his conscience, but the calling of God himself.

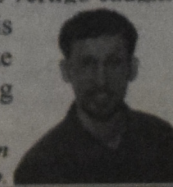
He did not respond by asking for a cottage on the lake with a big boat. He didn't even ask for power or fame. He asked for a rather humble gift: *a wise and discerning heart*. He wanted this so he could better serve the kingdom. The king's name was Solomon, and he was a fore-shadowing of the Christ, who called himself "the greater Solomon" (Luke 11:31).

Christ had a choice, too, between the ladder and the cross. "All of this could be yours" said the devil. I don't know if the vertigo caught Jesus for a moment as he was perched high up on this mountain. But the career offer by Satan is a private prison that has no comparison with the joy of serving even as a doorkeeper in God's new world.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

Eternal Student

Peter Schuurman



Stewardship

The Government itself still bears the responsibility to monitor the current deployment, to be clear about its objectives, tactics, and effectiveness, and to change it or terminate it if it proves destined to be ineffective in meeting the needs of Afghans. The Government has made a political commitment to early 2009, but even the Security Council's authorization for the International Security Assistance Force is extended only one year at a time. The switch from pursuing the defence interests of the interveners (the formal mandate of OEF) to the security interests of the host population (the formal mandate of ISAF) suggests a switch in military focus away from the effort to seek out and drive insurgents from their strongholds, with civilians inevitably caught in the crossfire, and toward supporting Afghan security forces in areas where the government already has a foothold and seeks to demonstrate the advantages of extending governmental authority.

Furthermore, such security efforts must be linked to serious efforts to restore the legitimacy of the Afghan Government through an inclusive political process. NATO representatives acknowledge that, quite apart from attacks on civilians, "just killing the Taliban is not really the game. The objective is to occupy space that is currently left to the insurgents...A lot of these spaces are effectively ungoverned."

But the key to stabilizing such space is not military prowess but winning the support of the local population for the Government that is to occupy the space, as well as support for the domestic and foreign forces sent to patrol it. Yet, some reports claim that as many as 80 percent of the local population in the Kandahar region support the Taliban.

The Senlis Council of the UK reports that there has been a disintegration of the confidence that Afghans had in the international community and the central government, in part because "foreign troops are perceived of as uncaring towards the value of the lives of Afghan citizens, with an increasing number of cases of civilian deaths or injuries at the hands of the coalition military."

That lost confidence should frame the central question about Canada in Afghanistan. Are Canadian troops in Kandahar primarily to engage in a counter-insurgency war that tries to defeat insurgents by military means and accepts significant levels of "collateral damage"? Or are they there to patrol communities in which

See *Afghanistan* on page 9...

Living with wealth

Richard Oostra is a retired businessman from Abbotsford. Richard took up our offer (see Steward's Tips) and wrote some reflections for this column. This is the second of a two in a row. In this issue, Richard challenges us on living with affluence:

Just last week I ran into a young Christian couple who are building a three million dollar house on a one million dollar plot of land. The first question that ran through my mind was: "Is this following Christ, and if not, 'How then should we live?'"

Money is a trust

Many people believe that money earned or inherited is theirs. Others feel that as long as they have paid their tithe the rest is theirs to do with as they wish. The parables of Jesus on money, however, tell us a different story. From them, we learn that money is a trust and we are accountable for everything God has entrusted to us. True Christianity is not merely a belief system, but also requires a trustee's attitude towards money.

A transformed people

Jesus taught us that believers are not to be entangled in or conformed to the desires, goals, ambitions or pleasures this world has to offer, but to be a people with different goals, seeking a different way of life. So many of us seek to have everything this world has, but we also want to have everything Christ has to offer.

Many believers think that it is acceptable to be rich on this earth and only give a small fraction of their wealth to the spiritually needy. Jesus did not ask the rich young ruler how much he had given, but rather asked if he would be willing to give away all he had in order to follow him. Jesus did not build his home among the wealthy, but he encouraged all those who would follow him to store up their wealth in eternity.

Riches justified?

Many of the Christian wealthy who just live for themselves are fully accepted in the church and therefore assume it will be the same with God. The church of today, however, is often very worldly, male-dominated, and money-focused institution. Its leadership often caters to the rich and avoids passing on any biblical warnings such as written in I Tim 6:17-19; James 5:1-5; I John 2:15-17.

It was Jesus who gave up all the riches of heaven so that later he could share these with those who would believe in and follow his teachings. On earth he had no place he could call his own because he lived and modeled his teachings. He loved all people, the rich as well as the poor, the educated and the simple, the moral and the immoral. But this doesn't mean that he justified a wrong lifestyle, rather he would call out to them and say: "Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not what I say?" (Luke 6:46)

Choose today

True Christianity is a choice as to whom we want to live for, to worship and love. God therefore gives us choices. We cannot serve the God of heaven and the god of this world. We cannot live for God and for self. We cannot bow our knee for Mammon and offer 'tips' to Jesus. We cannot please the flesh and feed the Spirit. We cannot have all the pleasures of this world and expect to inherit riches in heaven. Truly, if we want to follow Jesus we must make a choice. There is a price tag on salvation and that is walking in the footsteps of the Master. Jesus never preached merely believing, but rather a following him!

What about...?

Many who seek riches – even religious leaders and TV evangelists – will claim that it is okay to be rich because Abraham, Joseph, and Solomon were rich. Yes, there are rich people who truly love and follow Jesus, and of Abraham and Joseph it can be clearly seen that they had not their heart set on riches, but were fully in tune with God. Jesus, however, strongly warned us against the pursuance and storing up of riches. Look at Solomon – how his riches destroyed him morally and spiritually because he had not followed God's safeguards. Even today, some who have become wealthy wished this had not happened to them because often it has destroyed their

marriage or the spiritual well being of the family.

True wealthy believers do not live for their wealth. Their money is very incidental to them and not something they have their heart set on. Of Abraham we read over and over again, "He obeyed God."

We must remember we are all very rich in North America compared to people living in third-world countries. We who live under capitalism are all inclined to become influenced by a pursuit of materialism. From time to time we must cleanse ourselves from these influences. Because: "If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust us with true (heavenly) riches?" Luke 15:11; see also vs. 14

The key issue

Whether rich or poor only one question remains, "Does God control your heart?" It is easy to say that you love or believe in Jesus, but does he really have all of you?" If so, then the passion of your life will be extending his kingdom, (Matt 6:33) and this we do by living in obedience to his teachings and participating in his great commission. (Matt 28:20)

We, however, cannot live in obedience to his teachings unless his Spirit dwells in our hearts and consciences. In the flesh we will fail continually in serving him and that is why Jesus said, "You in me and I in you" – because without him we can do nothing.

Jesus in control

When Jesus is truly Lord in our lives he controls our life and our possessions. We will constantly acknowledge that all we have belongs to God. (I Cor 4:7) Then we will look for ways and means of using our wealth to reach out to others. In order to reach those who have never heard the Word, we must look for worthy causes to invest in, and thus discover the joy and satisfaction this lifestyle-giving will bring.

The sacredness of money

What makes the proper use of money sacred is that with it we can extend Christ's message both at home as well as abroad. You may have spiritually enough to eat, but millions have never heard – and are starving spiritually.

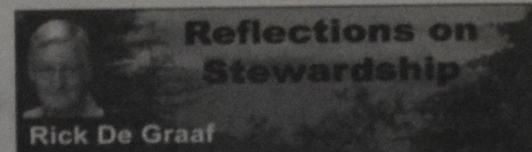
It takes money invested in the right causes to reach these people, and by doing this we become co-workers with God. With this in mind wouldn't we want to be careful to whom we give and how we live? Are we just feeding ourselves with pride and lust, or are we living in obedience and glorifying him?

Stewardly tip: Do I really need it: It helps to periodically clean out the basement, the garage and your closets. Is there something you haven't used in the last year? Yes? Can someone else use it? Is it useful yet? Yes: recycle it at your nearest thrift store.

Readers: Thanks to Richard for sharing this reflection! You're welcome to share your 'Stewardly Tips' so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Time for Learning

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Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

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Church

U.S. evangelicals divided on approach to global warming

Tom Strobe

WASHINGTON (BP) — A coalition of more than 110 evangelical Christians from various fields has issued a rebuttal to the arguments of evangelical leaders urging mandates to restrict human-induced global warming, calling instead for environmental policies it believes will more greatly benefit the poor.

The Interfaith Stewardship Alliance released its document partly in response to a February statement by the Evangelical Climate Initiative, then a coalition of 86 evangelical leaders who said human beings are causing global warming. Such climate change will affect the poor most acutely, the ECI said. The ECI endorsed legislation to decrease carbon dioxide emissions in an attempt to combat climate change.

The ISA, however, contended such mandatory reductions to counteract global warming would “not only fail to achieve that end but would also have the unintended consequence of serious harm to the world’s poor, delaying for decades or generations their rise from poverty and its attendant high rates of disease and premature death, and robbing them of the very tools they need to protect themselves from catastrophes.”

While it shares the same concern for the poor expressed by the ECI, the ISA said its alternative “would improve the lot of the poor more surely and effectively.”

Southern Baptist public policy specialist Barrett Duke commended the authors of the ISA statement

“Their examination of the data reveals a much different picture of global warming than we are hearing from the popular media,” said Duke, the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission’s vice president for public policy and research. “I am especially appreciative of their concern for the poor. This study should cause us all to stop and think very carefully before we impose restrictions on carbon emissions. The proposed solutions may very well do more harm to the world’s poorest people than any possible benefit that may or may not be achieved.”

“Everyone who wants to know if humans really are responsible for most of the warming our planet is experiencing and whether or not we are on the verge of climate-induced catastrophes should read this critique,” Duke told Baptist Press. “By offering a much needed balance to the doomsday scenarios and their promoters, the authors have provided an invaluable service to those of us trying to find the truth in the midst of the hype.”

The ISA statement intentionally does not include some well-known conservative evangelicals such as Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, Prison Fellowship founder Chuck Colson and ERLC President Richard Land.

Calvin Beisner, a professor at Knox Theological Seminary in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and a coauthor of the ISA statement, said he purposely sought as signers a mix of evangelicals rather than the “huge names in the Christian constellation.” He also did not want the difference between the ISA and the ECI portrayed as a “battle royale” between the evangelical right and left.

“I have huge respect for the people who signed the Evangelical Climate Initiative,” Beisner said at the news conference at which the ISA document was released. “We share the same worldview, the same basic theology, the same ethical commitments, all built on the Bible. We also share the same motivations.”

Beisner said the endorsers of ECI’s statement “have embraced something without knowing enough of the background to know that the actual [effects] of what they

propose are going to be precisely the opposite of what they intend.”

The ISA statement drew these five conclusions:

- “Foreseeable global warming will have moderate and mixed (not only harmful but also helpful), not catastrophic, consequences for humanity — including the poor — and the rest of the world’s inhabitants.
- “Natural causes may account for a large part, perhaps the majority, of the global warming in both the last 30 and the last 150 years, which together constitute an episode in the natural rising and falling cycles of global average temperature. Human emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are probably a minor and possibly an insignificant contributor to its causes.
- “Reducing carbon dioxide emissions would have at most an insignificant impact on the quantity and duration of global warming and would not significantly reduce alleged harmful effects.
- “Government-mandated carbon dioxide emissions reductions not only would not significantly curtail global warming or reduce its harmful effects but also would cause greater harm than good to humanity — especially the poor — while offering virtually no benefit to the rest of the world’s inhabitants.
- “In light of all the above, the most prudent response is not to try (almost certainly unsuccessfully and at enormous cost) to prevent or reduce whatever slight warming might really occur. It is instead to prepare to adapt by fostering means that will effectively protect humanity — especially the poor — not only from whatever harms might be anticipated from global warming but also from harms that might be fostered by other types of catastrophes, natural or manmade.”

The ECI made four claims in its earlier statement:

- “Human-induced climate change is real;
- “The consequences of climate change will be significant and will hit the poor the hardest;
- “Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem;
- “The need to act now is urgent. Governments, businesses, churches and individuals all have a role to play in addressing climate change — starting now.”

In its statement, the ECI cited reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which has been researching the issue since the late 1980s, and the National Academy of Sciences in asserting global warming is primarily caused by human beings. According to the ECI statement, the IPCC has documented a 50-year rise in global temperatures and predicted a continued increase, mostly because of human beings.

The IPCC also reported, however, probably 83 to 88 percent of the global warming that occurred in the 20th Century could be explained entirely by “variations in solar energy output,” the ISA’s Beisner told reporters. “If that’s so, that leaves only 12 to 17 percent that can be explained by all other causes combined, of which changes in CO₂ [carbon dioxide] are only one and of which human emissions of CO₂ from our activities are only a part, which indicates to me that we really are barking up the wrong tree if we think that human activity is the principal problem.”



The “idea of scientific consensus on [human-induced] global warming is an illusion,” according to the ISA.

“The consensus is badly overblown,” Beisner told reporters. “There is huge disagreement among a variety of different climate change-related scientists over all of the different aspects in terms of global warming science.”

“The consensus is usually mischaracterized,” he said, adding the consensus that exists is more on such things as the reality of global warming and the contribution of carbon dioxide to such climate change. “But [the] consensus is not that catastrophic, human-induced global warming is going on. I don’t find it in the scientific literature.”

The ISA statement said “drastic reductions” in the use of coal, oil and natural gas would halt or reverse economic advancement in poor countries. Requiring decreases in carbon dioxide emissions is “not cost-effective” and “will keep the poorest people of Earth from enjoying the benefits of abundant energy,” according to ISA. Technological progress in the next 50 years will not only produce “new energy generation” but “help reduce human impacts on the climate,” the ISA document said.

James Tonkovich, president of the Washington-based Institute on Religion and Democracy, told reporters at the ISA news conference, “An ethical environmental policy must elevate human beings, lifting them from poverty and pollution. By all means, let’s clean up the environment, something that the wealthier nations have done with great effectiveness already, but let’s remember that human industry and human belonging on the earth must form the basis of any morally sound environmental policy.”

There were 113 evangelical signers of the ISA statement, as well as 19 non-evangelicals. To see the list of signatories, see the ISA statement online at www.interfaithstewardship.org. The ECI statement may be accessed at www.christiansandclimate.org.

Church

World Evangelical Alliance opens Geneva office to influence UN

Geneva (ENI) – The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) says it has opened a new office in Geneva, Switzerland, in partnership with the Swiss Evangelical Alliance in order to help influence the newly established United Nations Human Rights Council.

"In a day of growing global complexities it is critical that WEA increases its impact on the global stage," Geoff Tunnicliffe, international director of the world alliance, said in a statement on the Web site of the grouping representing more than 400 million Evangelical Christians.

The WEA statement quoted Janet Epp Buckingham, a law and public policy director of the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, as saying the new office is located to make the greatest impact on human rights advocacy.

"With the new Human Rights Council meeting three times a year, Geneva is clearly the meeting place for dealing with issues of human rights," said Buckingham. "This office will be the focal point for WEA's advocacy for religious freedom around the world."

Jean-Paul Zuercher, general secretary of Réseau evangelique – a branch of the Swiss Evangelical Alliance – said: "It is of utmost importance that the WEA reinforces its presence in Geneva in order for the UN Human Rights Council to hear the voice of those who suffer because of their faith... The evangelicals sometimes have been overly cautious of international organizations. However, I personally think it is a blessing to be able to assist those who are weak and speak out for those who are voiceless in this world."

World Methodists sign up to Lutheran-Catholic agreement

Seoul, South Korea (ENI) – World Methodists have agreed to endorse a 1999 Lutheran-Roman Catholic agreement on the doctrine of justification, a key doctrinal question at the time of the 16th century Protestant Reformation.

The endorsement came at an July 18-19 meeting in Seoul of the 500-member governing body of the World Methodist Council (WMC) in advance of the World Methodist Conference, which opened in the South Korean capital on July 20.

The council also passed a resolution authorizing further dialogue with the Catholic Church, with the stated aim of "full communion in faith, mission and sacramental life," the United Methodist News Service reported from the South Korean capital.

secretary the Rev. Ishmael Noko described the formal Methodist endorsement of the joint declaration as a "very significant event". In the joint declaration, the LWF and the Catholic Church stated that mutual condemnations pronounced at the time of the Reformation do not apply to the present-day teaching of the two communions.

Noko said the endorsement of the declaration by the WMC made clear that the doctrine of justification is not an "ecumenical speciality between Lutherans and Roman Catholics," but represented the shared biblical faith of the universal church.

The WMC will release its statement on the affirmation of the declaration on July 23 at a ceremony to be attended by Noko and Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

Four women in India accused of 'forced' conversion

Vishal Arora

NEW DELHI (Compass Direct News) – Hindu extremists have threatened four Christian women accused of "forced" conversion in Tamil Nadu state, while two priests of a Catholic high school in neighboring Karnataka state have been attacked.

Albert Lael, organizing secretary of the All India Christian Council, told Compass that police on August 5 led a team of four women from the Good Shepherd Community Church in Erode district of Tamil Nadu to reach an agreement with the person who had accused them of forced conversion.

Lael said Selva Kumar, allegedly member of the Hindu extremist group Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), had complained to the Malayampalayam police station after the four church workers – identified only as Deepa, Jhabarani, Sangeeta, and Selvi – screened a film on Christ in Chinnampuram village.

Lael said that more than 150 villagers saw the film in an open area without raising any objections. But when the women were returning home after the film showing, Kumar, who is from a nearby village, stopped them and threatened them if they continued to preach.

"On July 29, when the women went to the village again to visit Christian families and conduct a program for children," Lael said, "more than 50 people from the neighboring villages surrounded them and hurled abuses at them."

The villagers wanted the women to state in writing that they would not show the film or preach Christianity in the area, but when they refused to do so, they took them to the police station.

Inspector Palarai Appam of the Malayampalayam police station told Compass that after police led the women to reach the compromise agreement, Kumar had decided not to file a formal complaint.

"As part of the compromise, the Christians have been asked not to preach Christianity to anyone who objects to it or expresses unwillingness to listen," he said.

The inspector denied the complainant was from the RSS. "Kumar is an advocate [lawyer]," he said. "He is not a member of the RSS. He is from a Dalit background and most people in the village are Dalit."

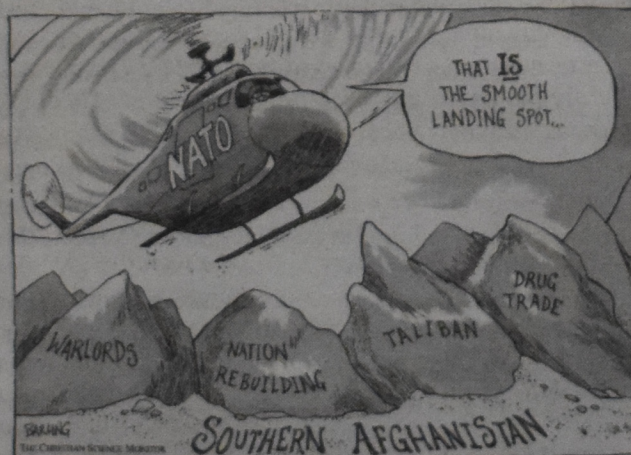
Afghanistan ... cont. from p. 7

they are welcome and where they support conditions that allow Afghans to pursue reconstruction in relative safety – with added stabilization efforts that include things like training Afghan police and military forces and mine clearance?

Canada's civilian leaders, unlike some NATO/ISAF officials, have to date not articulated any clear distinctions between a counter-insurgency war and the kind of military support to stabilization and policing efforts that ISAF calls for. Extending the authority of the Afghan Government into areas where the Taliban are strong, as experts attest, depends much more on negotiations to draw them into an inclusive political process than on attacks to defeat them.

For the Afghan Government's influence to be effectively expanded, it must be further legitimized through a negotiation and reconciliation process that draws in at least the moderate or willing elements of the Taliban and other spoilers, and through redoubled efforts to expand governmental services.

Prime Minister Harper's assertion during the May 17 debate that "Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are not interested in peace" clearly needs some nuancing to open the political process to Taliban Afghans prepared to enter that process. Seddiq Weera, an Afghan who is a Senior Associate at the Centre for Peace Studies at McMaster University and a Senior Policy Advisor to the Minister of Education in Afghanistan, calls on Canada to fund and promote a renewed diplomatic process designed to bring all stakeholders to the table, and others call for more effective international support for reconstruction.



But current stabilization efforts are premised on reinforcing the current political order, an order regarded by many Afghanistan watchers as intrinsically unstable inasmuch as it attempts to reward one side in Afghanistan's long-standing civil war. What was the

Northern Alliance now dominates, while the regions and ethnic communities broadly linked to the Taliban are sidelined. Weera describes the latter Taliban-linked communities as having genuine grievances which need to be recognized and addressed through the political process. As long as they are excluded from the political process they will act as spoilers.

Peggy Mason, a former Disarmament Ambassador for Canada and currently an instructor at the Pearson Peace-keeping Centre, adds that for foreign military stabilization forces to be successful, the key players have to want peace more than war – if that is the case, "individual spoilers can be effectively isolated and dealt with." But if significant stakeholders believe that peace will leave them indefinitely marginalized, they will prefer war to peace – and, as Dyer reminds us, Afghans wrote the book on the futility of trying to militarily defeat determined spoilers mounting armed insurgencies.

Even in his March 2006 report on Afghanistan, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan said he is "increasingly concerned that the insecurity that is poisoning the lives of

Afghans in several provinces of the country and that denies them the ability to enjoy the benefits of the peace process, is whittling away at the support for the institutions that have emerged under the Bonn process." Since then insecurity has escalated, including in hitherto stable parts of the country, bringing the legitimacy of the Government into growing disrepute. And as the legitimacy of the still fledgling Government falters, the legitimacy of the foreign troops that are there to support it and help extend its influence is obviously also brought into question.

The Harper Government owes it to the people of Canada as well as Afghanistan to undertake a thorough, dispassionate, and ongoing review of the effects of its military and other involvements in Afghanistan – in other words, to frankly measure success or failure in some reasonably transparent way. The context for evaluating military strategy and measuring its effectiveness must be the fundamental reality, now widely recognized, that there is no military solution available in Afghanistan.

The question is not whether a military-driven counter-insurgency strategy can work, or whether alternatives, such as strategies that focus on reconciliation, political inclusion, and protecting civilians, should be pursued. Conflict resolution, peacebuilding, reconstruction, and humanitarian support are not an alternative strategy, they must in fact be regarded as the only strategy. There is only one (complex) game in town – only one solution – and that involves attention to the resolution of the civil conflicts – the social, economic, and political grievances – that are ongoing and obviously predate the 2001 invasion.

Ernie Regehr, O.C., is Senior Policy Advisor with Project Ploughshares. Footnotes dropped. For full document see www.ploughshares.ca/

Wheels and pedals

Team Canada: Sea-to-Sea cyclists brave Iowa



RAGBRAI participants

Joanne van Dijk

Note: RAGBRAI (Register's Annual Great Bike Ride Across Iowa), held July 22-29, is a bicycle ride across the state of Iowa, a distance of 444 miles (700+ km). This was its 34th year. It now attracts some 10,000 cyclists from across the U.S. and even from other countries. Many of the towns that host the riders have only a few thousand residents, so it's quite a scramble to accommodate them all.

Churches and other organizations take the opportunity to raise funds by selling food to the participants. The cows watching along the fences, of course, think it's all a bunch of human foolishness.

Saturday, July 22

We (Alida, Vince and Jo van Dijk) were aiming to be in Sergeant Bluff by 2 p.m. so we could pick up Audrey Bos, Tania Vroenhoven, and Cindy VandeKuyt. When we arrived, we ate at the Lutheran church group (the first of many church dinners). This one was noodles and lots of beef, green beans and of course, pie. Then we went to look for the information centre to connect with the girls and on the way saw Cindy VandeKuyt waving at us at some corner. The girls had arrived and had been given a ride to our host family with their bikes and gear. We set up our tent and went to the required meetings, one for the riders and one for the support vehicles. I was embarrassed when the walkie talkie that had been given to me by Audrey went off in the middle of the meeting as one of the girls tried to contact me and I did not know how to turn it off. So I had to beat a hasty retreat.

Vince and I shopped some more for food for the trip and ate some pizza. The town was filling up fast with cyclists and the streets became clogged with vehicles. We went to bed at 9:30. Barbara Gill our hostess was very hospitable. We could shower in her house and she had made zucchini brownies, and had bought all kinds of fruit and cold

drinks. There was another group staying in her front yard. We camped in her side yard. Barb had to keep running to her job as security person at the Sioux City airport but she left her house open for us all night.

Our daily routine was to get up at 5 a.m. with the help of Cindy's alarm, dress, pack away our

tents, eat breakfast and be on the way by 6:15. Audrey offered to pack the van every day and she amazed us. We all learned to put the heavy stuff near the bottom. The flagpole worked very well and we flew the flag at all the host families, and in all the meeting towns. The girls biked together and Vince biked with whomever or alone. Our gifts for each of our hosts were: Dutch decorated tin with stroopwafels in them. Embossed thank you cards handmade by Cindy, with Canadian flag pin, mug with Canadian flags, souvenir pens, Dutch peppermints, and souvenirs for children in family, frisbees, etc.

Day 1. Sunday, July 23, Sergeant Bluff to Ida Grove (54 miles = 86.4 km)

On road by 6:30. I'm in Anthon, the meeting town, by 9:30. Some of the meeting towns have as few as 250 or 400 inhabitants. I head for the edge of town where the cyclists are coming in and wave the flag. Everyone in our group has arrived by 10:00,

Vince and I have pork on bun sold by the Veterans, and a coffee in a café so we can use their flush toilets. I'm in Ida Grove by 11, and set up the tent.

A group from Augustana College in Sioux Falls arrived at 10:30 a.m. They have a son-in-law teaching psychology at Calvin College and are good friends of Paul Moes who taught psychology to Alida at Dordt. We never saw them again on any of the following days which shows you how big the group of cyclists was. The four girls arrive at 12:30 and Vince comes later. He had two flats. He carried one spare tire so had to patch the other one.

Annie the hostess brings the girls to the high school for cold showers while I wait for Vince. There is a porta-toilet for all the campers. We go for showers, shop at Food Price and look unsuccessfully for tires. Then we pick up the girls and go to a nearby restaurant for lemonade, flurries and milkshakes to celebrate Tania's birthday that day. Cindy picks up a chicken dinner to take along. Cindy is allergic to white flour so eating on the road was a challenge for her.

We go to the Lutheran church for lasagna dinner. The line-up is very long and they give us a ticket with a number. There is a program in the church for those waiting and they will put on a board in the front of the sanctuary the numbers they are now serving. Vince and I pick up some ice and come back to eat.

We read a little and all are in bed by 8:30 because we are tired. It is very hot and at that time it has not started to cool down yet. At 4 a.m. a car drives up to the house to deliver something and we are all awake.

Day 2, Monday, July 24, Ida Grove to Audubon (77 miles = 123.2 km)

Up at 5. Rains in distance and we can see lightning. Everyone on road by 6:15. I go to nearby restaurant and have a hot tea and use the bathroom. Then drive to Arcadia, the meeting town for the day. Alida arrives

first at 9:50, the others come at 10 a.m. This is the most grueling day. There is a strong headwind so the cyclist have to pedal on the way down a hill and the hills are very steep. Vince arrives at 11:50. He again had a flat tire and the SAG wagon took him to the nearest bicycle repair shop where he bought a new tire for \$18. No more tire problems after that. We go into town to eat hamburger and chicken breast on a bun. We get a cell phone from one of the girls. The walkie talkies are not working as so many others are on the same wave length. Many times the cell phones also did not work. When more than 10,000 cyclists descended on a small town the system could not handle the phone volume. So the Canadian flags were our best way of communicating.

We leave at 1 p.m. I'm in Audubon, a town of about 2500, at 2:45 p.m. and check in with the information centre. We do not have a host family in Audubon. We can camp on the lawn of a big Victorian house on Hahn St. but there will be no washroom facilities, as she already has other campers. We will have to use the facilities of the high school nearby. I wait under a shade tree until the girls come at 4 p.m. They vote for 604 Hahn St. and they bike there while I try to go by car.

Everything is gridlock around the main camping areas. We leave a note for Vince on the message board to tell him where we are. Susan Taggetz greets us with cold lemonade and makes us feel very welcome. She shows us the bathrooms and showers which makes us very happy. She also has fruit etc. that we may eat. It is a gorgeous huge Victorian House on a hill. The girls start taking showers after setting up their tents. Susan's mother Ruth is there to help with the three small boys, one a baby of about three months. After Susan's husband Kurt comes home from work he takes Charles and Will for a walk to see the cyclists. We camp in front of the house under big trees.

I go back at 6 for Vince and leave more notes on the bulletin board. I also bring the girls to a church in town for supper which is serving till 7. Vince comes at 7. It was a very hard day and 400 cyclists are staying in Manning for the night because they cannot make it in.

Even though normally during RAGBRAI the police direct traffic from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the SAG wagons, 4 ambulances and firetrucks stop at 6, today the cyclists come riding into town long after it is dark. Many do not have lights on and now have to share the roads with cars. After Vince showers we shop at Food Pride and Casey's and look for supper. There is no food to be had in town. The line-ups at Pizza Hut are very long. The town is overloaded, and cannot handle the demand for showers and food. The traffic on the streets is gridlocked. Casey's has a waiting list of 65-85 pizza's that have been ordered and are waiting to be made the boss/cook tells us. Just as we ask for food, the



Wheels and pedals

one employee tells her boss they are out of pizza dough.

We are so tired by this time that sleep is more important than food and I make Vince some buns with strawberries before he goes to sleep, after blowing up the mattress. Until about 11 p.m. tractors with people (cyclists and tourists) come past the house as it is a tourist attraction. A very noisy transformer provides the air conditioning for a huge motor home parked across the street throughout the night. Every night we can hear the music being played at the main stage. Nevertheless we sleep well.

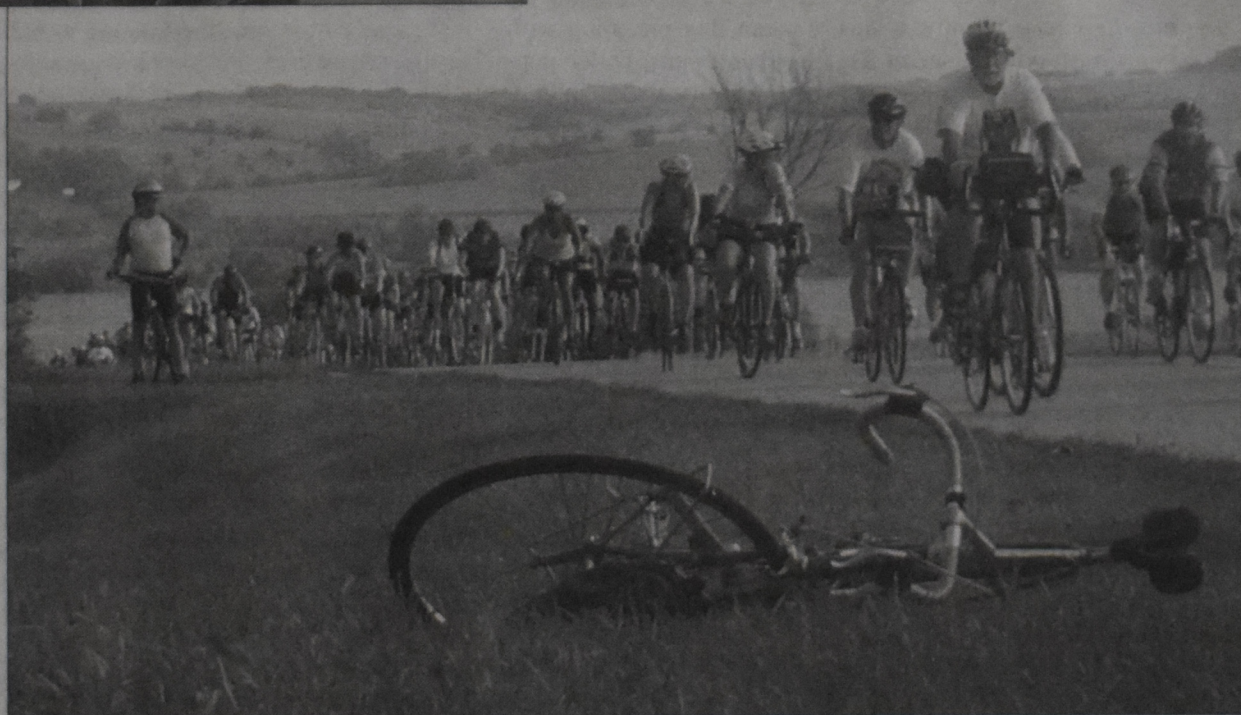
Day 3, Tuesday, July 25, Audubon to Waukeg (68 miles = 108.8 km.)

Up at 5. On road by 6:15. I leave town at 7, after coffee at Casey's. Get gas at Guthrey Center, the meeting place. Get a good parking spot at the Food store, put up the flag, and walk to the edge of town to wave the small flag. Many people sing the phrase "O Canada" or shout "Canadian eh?" when they see the Canadian flag. One man from Sioux City sings the whole anthem. Learned it from playing hockey against Winnipeg and Calgary. The first few days cyclists stop and tell me they are from Winnipeg, from London, Thunderbay, or from North Bay. One U.S. airforce cyclist shouts "my wife is from Saskatchewan". Someone in an office in Guthrie Centre comes by to talk because she is from Quebec.

Girls come through at 10:00 but will travel to next town to eat. Vince comes at 11. We eat in restaurant and they are running out of breakfast foods. So they manage to find two sausage patties, one egg patty, with toast and hashbrown rolls. Vince stomach is not feeling right. He cannot get used to the grazing of food. He leaves again at 12. I shop for food and leave at 1 p.m. In Waukeg, at 2. Meet Lisa, our hostess, and the girls, Kylie, Emily, and Hailey, who are running a very successful lemonade stand. I do a load of wash, shower, unload the van, and put up our tent in the back yard. The yard has only small trees (new neighborhood) which I find disappointing at first but turns out to be a blessing during the storm.



Where is the bathroom?



Girls pull in at 2:45. Tents are up by 4 and showers have started. It is very brewy. Vince comes in by 4:10. Lisa has made taverns/maid-rites (sloppy joes) for a snack along with watermelons, melons, and cookies. After eating a few we decide we don't need to go for supper. We relax and this is the only time in the week that I do my needlework for a while.

I shop for groceries and buy yellow sun flowers for Lisa. This is the first and only time in the week I find bran muffins for Cindy. Lisa and children and her sister go to the fairgrounds for the mainstage program. Lisa's

husband Mark is out of town at a conference. The music at the Grand Stand stops at 9 p.m. because of the storm but resumes from 11 to 12 because they have booked a famous band. The music is muted by the thunder. The toilet upstairs overflows.

We are in bed by 8:30. The weather turns ugly and by 9 we have a dreadful violent thunderstorm. Now I am thankful the trees are so small. After 10 p.m. trucks come around with loudspeakers telling us the EMERGENCY SHELTERS ARE NOW OPEN AND PEOPLE CAN MOVE INTO THE SHELTERS and that another violent storm is coming through in 15 minutes. The girls and I move into the living room and try to sleep on the floor for the night. Vince and I put the big rain-fly on our tent and Vince continues to sleep in the tent. The storm lasts till 3 a.m.

Day 4, Wednesday, July 26, Waukeg to Newton (70 miles = 112 km)

Alarm goes off at 5 but after a short discussion we decide to sleep in till 6 because of the lack of sleep during the night

3 in the afternoon. They had asked for an international family and we are it.

Girls pull in shortly afterwards. Since our hostess Pam and her 10 year old son Grant are riding RAGBRAI that day, her parents (Don and Pat) and Alex 12, Leah 2, and Tate 4, welcome us. We set up the tents on the front lawn and the series of showers starts and finishes at 5:30. It is very hot out. Pam and Grant arrive about an hour after we arrive. We go to eat at Pat's church as they are putting on a supper with First Presbyterian Church downtown where the menu is penne and chicken, salad, bun, pie, squares, and drinks all for \$5 if you are wearing a bracelet. Apples and oranges and water are free.

Girls have seen a group of about 100 cyclist whiz by them going up a hill and in the middle are four cyclists wearing the "Livestrong" black and yellow jersey. They cannot tell which one is Lance Armstrong. Pam tells us that she heard a limousine picked up Lance's group of four before they entered Newton.

After supper we do groceries at Fareway, find a pharmacy that is open to get eyedrops,

and listen to Lance on the big Jumbotron. The town square in front of the courthouse is totally packed and it is hard to breathe since it is very hot. We do not stay till the end but leave at 9 and are in bed by 10. The US Airforce has a team of 101 cyclists and 40 support crew. Some come to sit beside us at supper. They ask where we are from. When Alida says Canada, Jimmy says that they see a woman with a Canadian flag at the edges of towns. Alida (points at me) and tells him that's her. Jimmy's wife comes from Saskatchewan. The US Airforce team calls us the "Canadian Team" for the rest of the week.

Day 5, Thursday, July 27, Newton to Marengo (77 miles = 123.2 km)

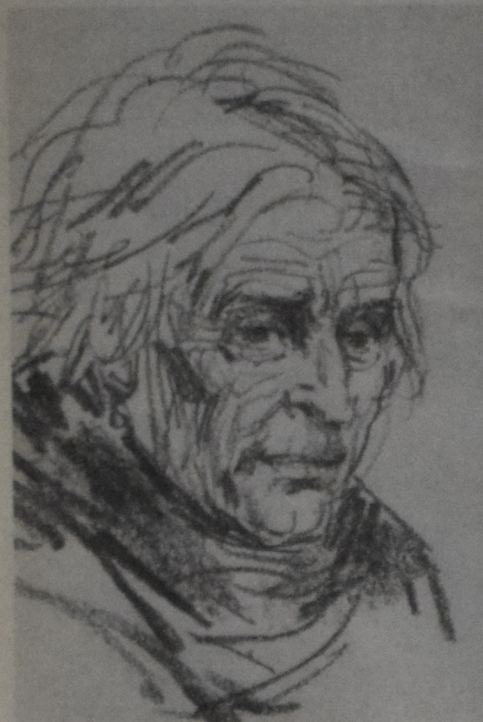
Everyone wakes up at 4:30 as van pulls into driveway delivering papers. Up at 5. CJ has made coffee for us and serves us on the front lawn. He works in Des Moines so leaves early. Girls leave at 6:20 and Vince leaves at 6:30. Find my way out of town by 7. Have to ask for directions at Casey's and come through totally deserted downtown area.

Alida and gang are in Montezuma, the meeting town, at 9:20. They had a good ride on a very hot day. They will stop to eat

Continued on page 12...

Transitions

Getting ready for transitions



Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

My 78-year-old neighbor smiled wryly as she told me that her body felt old this year, noticeably older than last year. To console her, I said, "I feel older, too, this year." She laughed, with a knowing look in her eyes. Without saying so, both of us were aware of the fact that she had faced more transitions than I had.

No matter what age we are, we continually face passages. Preparing for them can be a worthwhile and beneficial exercise, even if doing so isn't always an easy or effortless process.

How can you prepare for transitions? Here are some suggestions.

By looking at photos, by reading your childhood or adult journals, by talking with your parents, or by reminiscing with your spouse or a friend, reflect on the amazing transformation you have undergone in your lifetime. I've asked myself in wonderment, How did I make the transition from being a child who grew up on a chicken farm in Bowmanville, Ontario to a teenager who traveled through Europe? When did I reach the point in my life that I could study on my own, drive a car, handle my own finances, and leave home? When did I leave childhood behind and embrace adulthood?

How did I — a child who feared standing up in front of a crowd — grow up to become an adult able to read her stories to school children? Because our development is gradual, it can seem ordinary. In looking back, however, we see how extraordinary, miraculous, and marvellous it is.

Recalling the miles you've covered in your lifetime produces not only awe but also rejoicing. We don't rejoice because our lives have been perfect, easy, and stress-free, but because God was faithful each step of the way, providing for physical needs, instilling wisdom and discernment, and giving us a

Christian community to nurture us. He has rejoiced over us with singing and will continue to do so (Zephaniah 3:17); we, in response, can comply with the psalmist's invitation, "Come, let us rejoice in him" (Psalm 66:6).

I rejoice when I recall how God allowed me, as a child, to be part of a missionary family who lived in Korea for four years. I delight in the fact that I slowly discovered the joy of writing. I'm filled with happiness when I remember how God sustained me through my five pregnancies and through the transitions I encountered as I raised my children. I'm glad because of the way God has helped my husband and me to grow in love for each other and to build a strong marriage.

Rejoicing goes hand in hand with repentance. We can't truly rejoice in our milestones if we don't acknowledge that we stand on the foundation of God's grace. When we repent of how we have failed God and failed others, we acknowledge that the ultimate success of our journey is dependant on God's active participation.

Reflecting on the following questions might be helpful as you search your heart for actions, thoughts, or motives that you need to repent of. First, have you waited patiently for the Lord to do his sanctifying work in you and in those whom you love? I admit how often I have been impatient with

God. To remind me to be patient, I posted on the kitchen door a page that I tore out of a magazine. Pictured on it is a cluster of brilliant red flowers growing from a crack in a boulder and a quote by author and poet Kathleen Norris: "I've had to remember that it is God, and not myself, who has the power to make the barren places bloom and strike water from the rock."

Next, has your journey been characterized by courage or by fear? Fear has been my companion more often than I care to admit. Years ago I posted a quote by Dorothy Bernard on my fridge to remind me of a better path: "Courage is fear that has said its prayers."

Finally, have you forgotten that you were created for God's glory and not for your own? I admit that often I have forgotten, and the Holy Spirit has nudged me to confess the sin of pride.

As you move from one stage in life to the next, resolve to take on new challenges. In *Each Little Bird That Sings*, Great-uncle Edisto says to 10-year-old Comfort, "Open your arms to life! Let it strut into your heart in all its messy glory!" (Deborah Wiles, Harcourt, 2005, pp. 7). Excitedly anticipate new possibilities. Opportunities to engage in the "messy glory" of life are myriad: sponsoring a refugee family, learning how to play the guitar, taking a college course, or volunteering at a hospice.

Perhaps the most important

way to prepare for transitions is to follow David's admonition to himself: "Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him" (Psalm 62:5). Through prayer and reading the Bible, we may come to God and find that he gives us rest. Sometimes I've struggled to find rest but haven't been able to grasp it. But I've learned not to despair during those times.

God does not leave us to flounder. He sometimes sends the most unlikely people to teach us to trust him. For example, I felt particularly anxious as I faced the transition of my oldest daughter leaving home. While walking in my neighborhood one day, I talked to a woman who told me a remarkable story. Once when she was walking while reading her Bible, a man stopped his car beside her, jumped out, and tried to rape her. She yelled, "Jesus, help me!" The man ran away. When I asked her how she was able to carry on with her life after that traumatic event, she said, "As a Christian, you can't both trust and live in fear." This woman had no idea that I was having trouble trusting God, but God used her words to strengthen me.

You'll continue to experience many transitions. Prepare for them by reflecting on the past, by rejoicing in God's faithfulness, by repenting, by resolving to take on new challenges, and by resting in the Lord.

Cyclists brave Iowa continued from p.11

in the town. I am sitting at the edge of town. Vince comes in at 10:30. We eat at The Apple Basket and have a great pasta salad bar for \$6. Vince leaves at 11:30 again. After hearing he is a Canadian, a cyclist in the restaurant tells Vince he sees a woman with a Canadian flag at the edge of towns. Vince tells him it's me.

I'm in Marengo by 12:45 and talk to Kenney a disabled man who lives across from the water tower. He offers us his yard and the use of his toilet but there is no shade in his yard and the conditions of his house are not suitable. Girls come in at 1:15. Set up tents under the water tower after Cindy has scoured the town on her bike for other accommodations. There is nothing available. The town is small, about 2000, and looks depressed. We are next to the showers and there are portatoilets down the

street. But when the girls go to use them they are told the group camping there has rented them and they do not want us to use them. We all take showers rigged up next door and maintained by the fire department.

Vince arrives at 3 p.m. and showers. He has ridden with Lance Armstrong and his groupies for a few seconds as they whizzed past him. Mike, the man camping next to us is an uncle of the boy who was killed in RAGBRAI last year when a most violent storm came through Sheldon Iowa, and blew down a tree on his tent. Mike and other relatives from South East Iowa are riding in memory of his nephew.

We just sit around and read as it is very hot. The girls go shopping at Casey's to cool off. During the night Vince takes everyone for a run to the portatoilets near Casey's. He makes another run at 5 in the

morning only to find out that these are also rented by a private group but this group does not mind us using them. Near bigger cities you would get a lot of day riders which would swell the group to 15,000. And of course Lance attracted many riders also. He was meant to come for 1½ days but stretched it to 3. And he enjoyed it so much that he promised to ride the whole week next year.

Day 6, Friday, July 28, Marengo to Coralville (48 miles = 76.8 km)

Leave Marengo by 6:20 for girls, 6:35 for Vince, and 6:40 for me. Vince arrives in Williamsburg, the meeting town by 8:20. I have a good spot at the beginning of town and sit with two elderly neighbors, Dorothy and Elsie. A pharmacist from Omaha asks Dorothy for antacids as he has eaten a burrito

for breakfast that is giving him a lot of heartburn and he has forgotten his own medicine. She gives him lots of Tums.

At one point Dorothy tries to cross the road to talk to her brother and his wife but cannot find one opening to cross the road. A young girl stops to wait for her girlfriend and shares she had breast cancer in 2003, which came back in 2005 and she is just finished her round of chemotherapy. She is riding the one day to see if she can make it. She uses Dorothy's bathroom. On her bike she hangs a shirt with the words CHEMO ADDICT so her girlfriend can spot her. Lance Armstrong is an inspiration to her.

Vince comes by at 8:20 a.m. I stop at a rest area along the I80 to sleep until 11:15 a.m. because I am so sleepy. Then on to Coralville. Have to ask for directions in town. Arrive at house and girls are in kitch-

en cooling off. It is a very, very hot day. They called the hostess Jessica and she is coming home from her work. We sit around outside (meet neighbors) but after Jessica comes home and offers us the downstairs we decide to sleep inside. We take our tent down again.

Until 2 weeks ago Lance was to have stayed at this house but then they found an empty house for him. Josh Schamberger is one of the co-chairman of the committee for Coralville so expects to work all night. He comes home for a few hours of sleep in the early morning. Jessica is a most gracious hostess and we sit around the table eating grapes and talking to her.

Vince is in by 1:30 and everyone showers. Jessica is cooking turkey chili for us for supper at 6. We go to the mall to visit with our son and wife from Minnesota till 5:30. At home we meet Deb and Tom

Summer



RAGBRAI endpoint, the Mississippi River.

Schamberger, Josh's parents. They are military people who moved a lot. Lived in Cuba and Josh was born at Guantanamo Bay. Deb took care of 18-month-old Garrison all day. She also takes care of him after supper so we can talk. We have a good time. Jessica works for Goodwill finding suitable jobs for clients and going around to companies to drum up jobs clients can do. Take pictures downstairs, say goodbye and are in bed by 9.

Day 7, Saturday, July 29 Coralville to Muscatine (50 miles = 80 km)

Up at 5. Jessica has made coffee and has yogurt and fruit. She wakes up Garrison as she does not want him to miss anything of the adventure. She is a first time hostess. We give Garrison a Canadian flag. Girls leave by 6:15 and Vince by 6:30 a.m. Sun is very bright already. It will be a very hot day.

Come into meeting town of West Liberty at 8. Sit in front of house with little boy Cameron, about 4 years old, who sprays cyclists with water hose. Girls have already passed through this town. Vince arrives at 9 a.m. We go to "The Downtowner" and have breakfast. It is very hot. Contrary to other days, the cyclist are led on a route outside the town so downtown is deserted. Vince will stop riding as we have visitors for the afternoon and if he rides all day he is too tired to visit with them.

We come to Muscatine and find out they have given us the wrong maps so the girls have the wrong maps too. We ask several times and find the McKenzie's. Arrive about 12:30. Girls not here yet. Talk to Kim and Jerry and unload. Then 3 girls arrive while Alida went back to the beginning of town looking for us. She comes shortly after. We all shower.

We see Jerry's amazing marble

collection. We sit around as it is very hot and Kim and Jerry offer us their air conditioned house to sleep in. Audrey picks up her car at the high school and we repack cars. At supper time we all go the family restaurant in the mall and give the staff a scare. They are expecting a crowd from a funeral, are serving a birthday party and now have to serve a party of twelve (Kim and Jerry are there too).

We have a very good supper. (I have two huge porkchops and Vince had a steak dinner. Alida had a chicken stirfry dinner). Jerry drives us around town to show us where he works, the renewed waterfront, and a beautiful new park the town fixed up for millions of dollars. There are very few riders left in town. We go to the Watermelon Patch out of town and they buy us a watermelon to take home.

We are in bed by 9, and Isabel a 4-year-old is dropped off by Kim's Mom to stay the night also. Since Kim had asked Jerry for a Canadian flag to fly but he had none (he is supervisor of the works department in town) we give her the medium sized Canadian flag we have.

We can recommend this ride to anyone as you will also have an incredible holiday if you go on RAGBRAI. The Iowa scenery is beautiful and the route takes you through mainly rural sections of Iowa. The hospitality of the people is amazing. So many churches and groups working together to feed the thousands of cyclists and raise money for good causes. And in the 34 years of RAGBRAI they have never had an incidence of food-borne illness. They heavily stress frequent handwashing as a way to prevent it. And the other cyclists and hosts you meet are most interesting. And yes it is true that there is a segment who go for the drinking and partying but they did not bother us.

How I spent my summer

This summer Jack and I both turn fifty. Actually, he's been fifty already since June. My birthday is tomorrow. Even with my master plan of living to 104, I must face the fact that "middle-age" is now an imminent reality. I am at that awkward stage when a person's eyesight begins to weaken, while at the same time I'm convinced that I'm just beginning to see life clearly. A friend asked me how I feel about turning fifty. Frankly, this is the first I've really given the matter much thought. (And just in time for the August column, too.)

I know that tomorrow morning I'll only be one day older than I am today. It's just that I will have lived fifty years' worth of yesterdays. One of the neat things about getting older is that you're able to remember the experience of being younger. Sometimes those memories arise in the most unexpected circumstances.

The week before we left on our summer holiday was frenzied. I seriously wondered whether a few days away were worth all the extra work. But looking at my weary husband, I knew the best thing for both of us was to take a break. The weather alternated between sultry and stormy. Jack worked at harvesting the wheat crop. When it rained, he shifted gears into barn cleaning mode. For my part I did some bookkeeping, tried to stay on top of the yard work, and stepped into my farmhand role as required. It seemed impossible that we could be ready to leave for vacation by the weekend, but we kept praying that all things would work out.

Thursday evening Jack and the Gleaner were plugging through the very last wheat field, several miles from home. The wild winds had done nothing to reduce the oppressive heat throughout the day, and now the skies grew steadily darker. I decided to drive over with some sandwiches and coffee and see how things were going. James and a friend of his arrived at the same time. Jack hopped out of the combine while the grain emptied into a gravity bin. He told us to find a tarp and some ropes to cover the other wagon that was already full. He took the lunch from my hand, and looked up at the darkening skies. "Thanks," he said, "I think I better keep going."

Back at home I paced around the yard, closing doors and trying to batten down the hatches. I noticed how perfectly still the world had suddenly grown — no birds singing, leaves rustling or winds blowing — just an eerie calm. Overhead the sky was an odd greenish-grey, and the northwest horizon (where Jack was combining), was black as night. Rocky and I stood in the front yard absorbing the silence.

I felt like I was eight years-old again, in the care of my brother, waiting for the storm to hit. Jimmy had raced around the house, slamming windows shut and telling me not to panic. The sky had that same strange hue. The front door kept blowing open. He put a chair in front of it and told me to sit there. I did. A gust of wind blasted the door open and the chair and I both flew across the living room. Jim came into the room and told me to quit fooling around. He replaced the chair against the door and I sat on it again, just about to tell him what happened when another gust of wind repeated the event and eliminated the need for further explanation. Seldom have I seen my brother nervous, but that evening

the stress was clear on his face. Strangely, I wasn't afraid, only fascinated with what was taking place. Later on we learned that a tornado had touched down just a few miles away.

Now the clouds above me roiled like an angry river. The wind picked up and I saw the rain coming in the distance. Rocky and I retreated to the safety of the house. I stood at an upstairs window, mesmerized by the drama unfolding outside. Watching the raw power of the wind and lightning I was reminded of my own limitations, feeling somewhat vulnerable, and yet assured that my times are in much bigger hands than my own — hands that have no boundaries, hands that know no fear.

A little while later Jack called to say he had finished the field just before the deluge hit and he was on his way home. Cooler temperatures the next day enabled him to finish work in the barns, and by the weekend we were good to go on our holiday.

The plan was to tour with our motorbikes through Algonquin Park and into northern Quebec. We left on a spectacular morning, but I spent the first hour of the ride replaying a mental checklist of critical items I hoped I had packed. Once it was too late to turn around, we pulled into a Tim Horton's parking lot crowded with Harleys. Now I began worrying about whether I could negotiate the parking lot without getting hit by a car, and without running into one of the Harleys by mistake.

As we left the coffee shop, one of the Harley women complimented my Suzuki. This is something akin to a Jew talking to a Samaritan and I was distracted by her comment. I smiled, but as we pulled back onto the road I wondered if I had remembered to put my purse back into the saddlebag, and if so...had I done up the saddlebag securely?

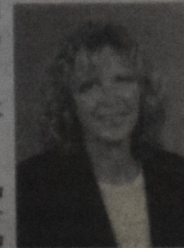
I was about to start fretting over whether I actually knew enough French to secure a hotel room, when I realized how ridiculous my thoughts had become. How is it that at eight years of age I trusted God intuitively, and now, after nearly fifty years of experiencing his unfailing love and care, I was worrying constantly about the most trivial details? I determined not to waste another minute of this vacation that we had prayed for so diligently on anxious thoughts.

It was a glorious week. We had nearly perfect weather, safe roads, fabulous meals, lovely places to stay. Riding home I felt as if I could take on the world. Until I saw the to-do list I had left on my desk the previous week. But before I allowed myself to look at that list, I picked up my Bible. The daily reading took me through Psalm 94, and I underlined verse 19, "In the multitude of my anxieties within me, Your comforts delight my soul."

So how do I feel about being fifty? I'm okay with that. Honestly. I don't know how half a century has passed so quickly, but I really am okay with it. And what I want most out of the next fifty years is to be able to stand like that eight year-old I once was, trusting God to see me through all the storms as well as the sunny days ahead.

Besides, I may be fifty, but Jack is "fifty-too."

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Ecclesiastes

Life as a spot of light

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for it is now that God favors what you do. Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun – all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 9:7-10

A. A. van Ruler

The white, spotless clothing in our text are signs of celebration. Dirty, stained clothes are signs of mourning. In view of the context, it is, therefore, surprising that the Preacher doesn't urge us to dress in mourning but in festive dress – and to "always" do so. We should dress up not just now and then, on special occasions, but every day of our lives. We should go through life dressed to celebrate.

That's not what we'd expect, given that generally speaking the Preacher has a dark, pessimistic view of human labor under the sun. In his experience, it has produced nothing of enduring value. Moreover, it is rife with contradictions and absurdity. So you'd think that the Preacher would urge people to an attitude of mourning. But he does precisely the opposite. Instead, he says, "Always be clothed in white" – that is, go dressed as if you're always celebrating.

The phrase, "and always anoint your head with oil," makes the same point. Anointing one's head with fragrant oil was also a sign of celebration and joy.

How are we to understand this advice? I take it that he is urging us to travel the narrow, still viable strip that is left in the desert of this world. The desert has not yet covered everything. The world isn't totally uninhabitable. The roadway of life is not completely impassable.

True, there are many dead-ends, and we often don't know which way to turn. We often don't know the way in, much less the way through. But to conclude that there's nothing worthwhile whatsoever would be going too far.

There is still eating and drinking, enjoying bread and wine. There is marriage, family, the blessing of children. There is merrymaking, games, celebrating, enjoyment. It may be a very narrow path through a wide desert; nevertheless, it is a

path. And this is the path he urges us to take.

But perhaps this reading is somewhat crabbed and mean. Even stingy and grasping. Perhaps the Preacher intends his words to be more like a challenge. Perhaps he wants us to acknowledge the darkness of the cosmos and of human existence but then to bring a festive, exuberant element into the midst of this oppressive, dreary reality. Our celebrations, then, would be a frontal attack on the leaden gravity of this absurd existence. It is a counter-culture.

Then we would see which lasts or triumphs in the long run – the darkness of fate or the lightness of human joy. At the end, of course, comes death – the triumph of darkness.

But that shouldn't stop us from letting the light in our hearts shine now, says the Preacher. This may be part of what Paul calls delighting in the Lord. This, too, is delighting in hope against hope. It is to be a peacock, prancing madly about in a mad world displaying his gorgeous feathers. It is life itself rebelling against death.

On the other hand, it also shows a good measure of prudence. You must not imagine, suggests the Preacher, that you can wholly solve all the riddles of life and reality. You cannot turn everything upside down. You cannot spread out the whole of being like the peacock spreads his beautiful tail-feathers.

One day we will be able to, says Paul: in the day of Christ's glory, on the last day.

Then all tears will be wiped away from our eyes. Then all that is and that happens will be turned

upside-down and we will see that everything participates in the glory of God, our Creator and Redeemer. But we still have a ways to go till that day comes. Now it is still hard to say of most things where and how they partake of God's glory. Most things are hidden in shadow.

So then don't grasp for the absolute and totality, says the Preacher. Limit yourself to what is secondary, to what is given. Here – in eating and drinking, in family and children – you will actually experience something of God's goodness.

Whatever you do, every day dress yourself in your most festive clothes and pour a little fragrant oil on your head – not your final, absolute holiday clothes and not the oil of the day of the Lord, but the simple things of daily life.

We have considered three facets of the Preacher's advice: first, tread the narrow path that exists, second, challenge the rest of being, and third, do not grasp for the absolute. We may add a fourth: Going dressed in

festive clothes and anointed with oil ought not to be a desperate attempt at seizing a bit of happiness and joy. It ought to be done with the idea that: "If I do it, it's because God has always wanted it this way."

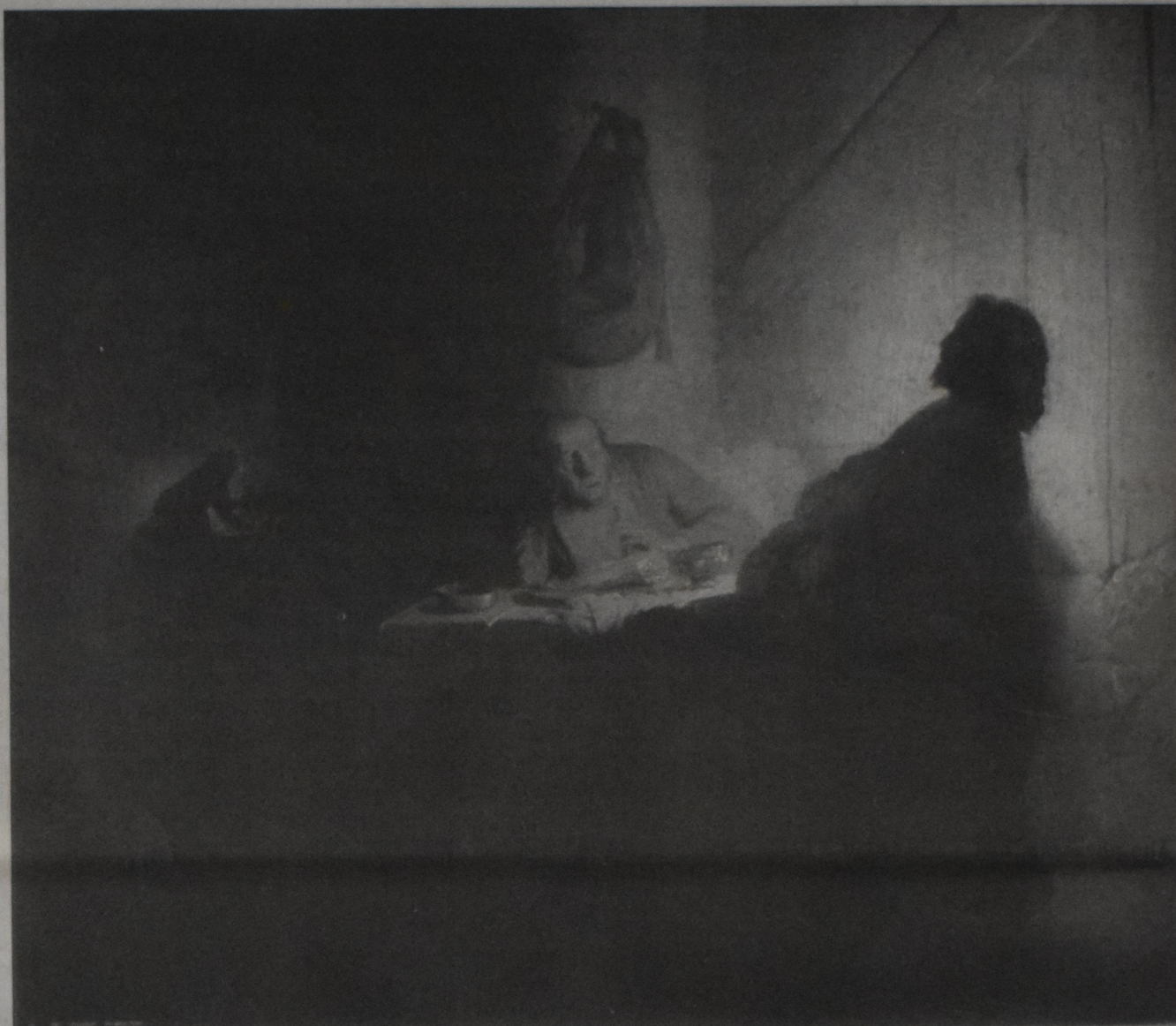
In other words, we are a small spot of light in the midst of the darkness of all that is because our sovereign God disposed it so. Why God disposed things this way may occasion much deep thought and give rise to many answers. But meanwhile it is concrete reality.

This same will of God that so disposed things also calls us to this modest deed: to always go dressed in white with oil on your head is simply a matter of obedience. It is, therefore, not always easy to be genuinely happy and joyful. It's something that has to become a habit. We must learn to be obedient in this way too.

At the same time, we must not forget that it is also the will of God in the sense that it is a gift of God. It is he who gives us the white clothes and the oil of joy. It is he who gives us to eat and to drink. He gives us life.

When we rejoice in these things, this too is part of God's will in the sense that he delights in our delight. Someone who goes through life dressed in festive clothes pleases the Lord. It makes the Creator of heaven and earth happy to see it. And this fact is so astounding that it will take all our lives for that to sink in.

However, the Preacher doesn't only urge us to celebrate; he also urges us to work energetically: "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (vs.10). These two things belong together, of course. We cannot simply and solely sit back and enjoy life. We must also roll up our sleeves and work diligently. Yet, we must not think we can master life; we must also receive it as a gift. We need both simultaneously – both celebration and exertion, both joy and work. This spot of light may be surrounded by the darkness that is the futility of all things – but it is a spot of light.



Rembrandt was deeply aware of the spot of light

Weeds and aching joints

Dandelions, daisies, and giant lambs



Curt Gesch

I remember when the herbicide Atrazine became popular. Instead of weedy corn fields that provided both food and sleeping quarters for pheasants, one could peer down a row of corn at ground level from one end of the field until the other. The pheasants had a superhighway within a mall; they sprinted to safety before we had our guns loaded. But they needed to find a grassy hotel for the night.

I remember when lambsquarters, an edible weed of some nutritional value became resistant to Atrazine. These weeds, quite easy to eradicate with hoes or cultivators, became quite a troublesome pest under a chemical regime. They not only survived, but seemed to actually grow larger. Farmers used to say, "Those darn weeds use herbicide as fertilizer."

Until a new, improved weed-killer came along, pheasants once more had food, cover, and bed all under one roof in the weed-infested parts of the cornfield. I remember one droughty year when one quarter of a field of silage corn looked more like a weed patch than a cornfield. The corn only grew to about six feet high with resistant weeds – pigweed and lambsquarters – poking through the canopy of corn.

Not only pheasants were happy that year: seed-eating birds like juncos and song sparrows were in heaven. Ducks found that there was not only waste corn to scavenge but also nutritious weed-snacks. A young duck hunter discovered that weed seeds produced high-quality mallards for meals. And, much to everyone's surprise, the corn silage from that weedy field ended up low

in tonnage, but higher in nutritional value than that from the same farmer's "clean" fields. I remember my friend saying, "Maybe we should plant weeds and pray for drought." (He didn't mean it.)

For the suburban gardener lambsquarters aren't so much the problem: it's dandelions in the lawn. Until recently, they could be controlled quite easily by using some sort of herbicide combined with a grass fertilizer. Dandelions, plantain, chickweed, even clover succumbed to the 2,4,D, leaving the lawn a smooth, green carpet, perfect for looking at, and perfect for mowing, and perfect for using up irrigation water. Some cities have recently passed "pesticide-free" yard laws. Better for the birds.

The Era of the Lawn has spelled doom for many native bird species. Robins seem immune to the effects of herbicide-laden lawns. Starlings and house sparrows prefer shopping centres to lawns, but seem to get along. Ground-feeding, seed-eating birds like juncos and chipping sparrows don't do so well, however, when herbicides and lawns replace shrubbery and poison-free bugs and seeds.

Finches of various sorts – goldfinches, house finches, pine siskins – are common when fed niger seed, which replaces the thistle seeds, dandelion seed and other weedy delights. One of my favourite sights occurs when dandelions go to seed and tiny pine siskins grasp a dandelion stalk near the top, bend it over with their miniscule siskin-weight, and grab seed after seed.

In my yard, I control dandelions with frequent mowings and

Those aching knees

Maynard van der Galien

Most dairy farmers, who milk in a tie-stall barn, and those who retired from the industry, have problems with their knees. It's called milker's knee. After years of squatting down to attach milkers to the cows, or throwing around hay bales, knees are often the first joints that suffer.

Milker's knee happens when the cartilage between the bones starts to wear away. After years of ups and downs in the barn, a farmer will begin to notice pain in his knees.

And it's not only the up and down movements that are hard on the knees, it's also the pulling and pushing to get new cows and fresh heifers into their stalls. Lugging around pails of milk, water and grain to feed the calves is a twice-daily job that never ends. It all takes a big toll on the knees.

Bad knees and many sore backs were one of the reasons I quit dairy farming a few years ago. Now I operate a restaurant and I find it much easier on the joints – no pushing and shoving cattle and squatting down milking cows. The knees still ache sometimes. Sitting too long in one position is hard on the knees – like in church or at a meeting where you can't get up and walk a few steps and stretch them.

There is one way young farmers can prevent getting milker's knee. Switching from a tie-stall to a parlour system is the smart way to milk cows today. A parlour eliminates the need to squat all the time.

Due to the physical nature of farming, farmers are more at risk of developing arthritis than many other occupations, a Purdue University researcher says.

Paul Jones says arthritis can result from doing activities like baling hay or milking cows for many years. To help farmers with this disabling condition, Jones, through the University's Breaking New Ground Resource Center, has partnered with the Indiana chapter to the Arthritis Foundation to publish *Arthritis and Agriculture: A Guide to Understanding and Living with Arthritis*.

The publication covers a variety of arthritis-related topics, including common types of arthritis, managing the disease, unproven remedies and sources of assistance, says Jones.

The guide also gives advice on methods of modifying farm tasks to provide added protection to joints. In addition, emphasis is placed on proper diagnosis, exercise, medication, stress management and working with a team of professionals to cope with arthritis.

with fertilizer. Living on a farm, I am free to use quite unorthodox methods of fertilizing. One year I covered part of the worst dandelion-infested front lawn with sawdust that had been used as chicken bedding. Not enough chicken manure to "burn" the lawn, but enough to fertilize and enough sawdust to provide a mulch layer for the moisture-loving grass.

Dandelions, yes: some, but not too many. Certainly enough left for many siskin-snacks.

Three times I have been reminded of the value of weeds for wildlife. (But before I go on, let me assure all the farmers and ranchers reading this that I am not a weed-hugger. I am not suggesting that the "enemy" in the parable – that planter of tares amid the wheat

Arthritis actually refers to more than 100 different ailments known as rheumatic diseases. The most common types are osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis, bursitis and tendonitis.

Osteoarthritis causes the breakdown of the smooth, gliding surface of a joint, known as cartilage. When cartilage is destroyed, raw bone ends may thicken and form boney overgrowth called spurs.

For farmers, frequent lifting of heavy objects, repeated use of vibrating machinery or constant bending to perform certain tasks can add to the stress on joints and set the stage for osteoarthritis, particularly of weight-bearing joints, the publication says.

Rheumatoid arthritis, an inflammatory condition that primarily affects the thin membrane (synovium) that lines and lubricates a joint, involves the entire body. It can affect men and women of all ages, but is more common among females in their 20s and 30s.

A farmer may develop bursitis or tendonitis when certain muscles or tendons are stressed, such as by too much lifting, carrying or throwing, or by constantly gripping and manipulating the controls on farm equipment, according to information in the publication.

Both bursitis and tendonitis are painful conditions that usually last only a short time and do not cause permanent damage.

There is no cure for arthritis, but the guide lists several ways to reduce its effect, including:

Don't ignore joint pain – see a doctor and get a specific diagnosis. The doctor will suggest a treatment plan, and a commitment to following that plan is essential to reducing the affects of arthritis.

Be active. Regular exercise protects joints by strengthening the muscles around them, lessens the pain and allows for an increased range of movement, and reduces fatigue. Exercise also can help reduce excess weight, and less weight equals less stress on joints, especially the knees, hips, back and feet.

There! Now to get up and stretch the legs.

Maynard van der Galien owns and operates the Old Towne Hall Restaurant and Tea Room in downtown Renfrew, Ont. The restaurant was the recipient of the 2006 Healthy Living Award in the Restaurant Category for Renfrew County – the only restaurant to receive this award from the Renfrew County Health Unit.

– was the good guy. Nor I am talking here about oxeye daisies, orange hawkweed, Canada thistle, or scentless chamomile. I am talking about weeds that are either native plants, long-time introduced species that we've learned to live with or things we intend to plant, for their seeds as well as for their blooms.)

Continued on page 17...

Theology

Guarded through faith: assurance and the doctrine of perseverance

Albert Mohler

Traumatic world events and nagging questions of belief sometimes cause Christians to be troubled in spirit and to question their assurance of faith. In every generation, believers have struggled with the question of assurance in salvation. As always, the church confronts this issue as both a pressing theological question and as an urgent pastoral concern. Answering these questions anew, we are reminded once again that all doctrine is practical and that the great biblical truths of the Christian faith are meant not only for our intellectual acceptance, but for our spiritual health.

Many Christians suffer from a lack of Christian assurance. They lack confidence in their salvation and are troubled by nagging doubts, perplexing questions, and a lack of clarity about whether assurance of salvation is actually possible. At the same time, the church has always faced the reality of false professors and those who fall away. These are problems that trouble the soul and raise unavoidable theological questions.

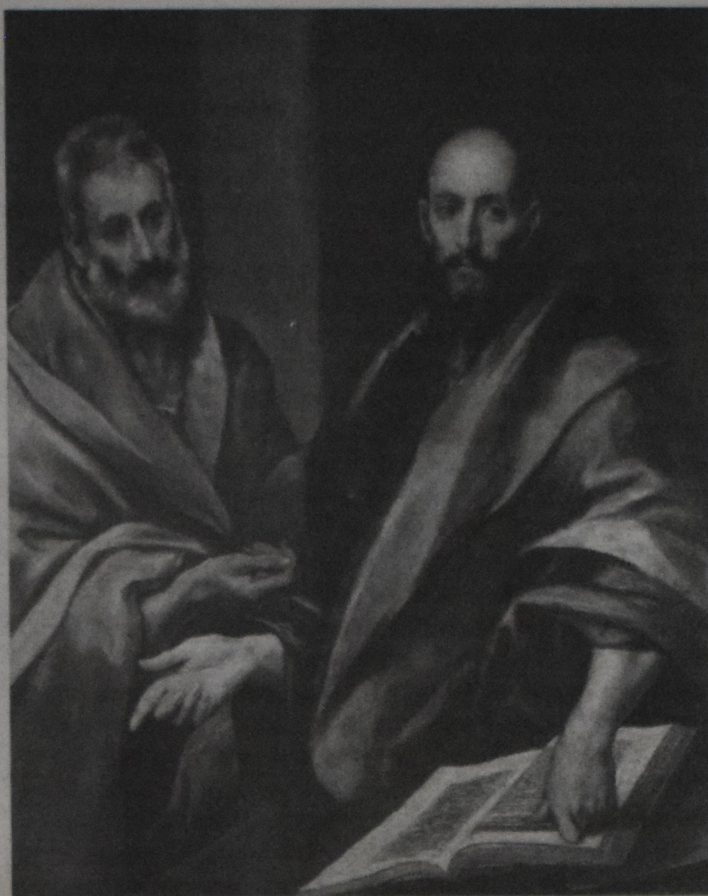
Clearly, now is the time for clarification and for the recovery of a biblical concept of assurance. Beyond the immediate questions of assurance and false professors, the church must also confront superficial and inadequate understandings of assurance – concepts that can actually mislead and confuse.

The Apostle Paul assured the Christians in Philippi of his absolute confidence “that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” [Philippians 1:6]. The logic of that passage is of vital importance. Paul’s confidence was not that the Philippians would be able to preserve themselves. To the contrary, Paul’s confidence was established in Jesus Christ and in the promise that Christ would complete the work he had surely begun in them.

Coming to the end of his own life, Paul expressed personal confidence that the Lord would “bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom” [2 Timothy 4:18]. Without this confidence, how could Paul have faced the prospect of his own death? His desire was for fellow believers to experience this same confidence and assurance.

Jesus taught his disciples a great deal about the believer’s assurance, ultimately establishing assurance in the Father’s promises to the Son. In the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches that “this is the will of him who sent Me, that I would lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day” [John 6:39]. This is a magnificent promise, and one that makes sense only in light of Jesus’ straightforward revelation concerning the Father’s authority in salvation: “All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me I will never cast out” [John 6:37].

Those who are in Christ’s hands will never be lost, for they have been called, drawn, and given to him by the Father himself. As



Apostles Peter and Paul, *El Greco, 1592 Oil on canvas.*

Jesus the Good Shepherd said in John 10, “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” [John 10:27-29].

Thus a consistent biblical theme emerges from the scriptural text. Jesus assured his disciples that their salvation was rooted in the eternal purposes of God and that those who truly come to faith in him are safe within God’s mercy. No one is able to snatch believers out of the Father’s hand, and all who come to the Son are preserved by the Father.

Christians should find great comfort in the biblical promises of assurance. This is because these promises are founded ultimately in the eternal purposes of God, in the Son’s accomplished work, and in the Father’s vindication of the Son. Those who truly come to Christ by faith are guarded, preserved, and kept by the power of God. Our Lord did not intend his people to be trapped in a maze of doubt and insecurity. To the contrary, Christ instructed his sheep to trust in him and his promises.

Assurance of salvation is indeed possible – and is a Christian responsibility. Pernicious doubt concerning salvation may be an indication that the believer does not truly trust the character, power, and purposes of God. Thus a believer’s insecurity – sometimes disguised as an artificial humility – can be evidence of a heart that does not adequately trust in the promises of God.

At the same time, saving faith is demonstrated in a transformed life. Peter, for exam-

ple, instructed believers to observe their lives, looking for the evidence of authentic faith and the marks of true discipleship. Peter summarizes his exhortation with these unforgettable words: “Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall” [2 Peter 1:10].

How are believers to make their “calling and election sure?” There can be no question that Peter expected Christians to look and strive for the characteristics which should mark those who have been transformed by the power of God. Thus, the believer’s calling and election – the very foundation of the salvation experience – would be evident in a new heart and a transformed life.

Paul also repeatedly warned Christians not to abandon their faith or to fall prey to false teachers. He even went so far as to identify some who had “nullified” the grace of God [Galatians 2:21] and others who had fallen away and abandoned their faith. Demas, for example, “in love with the present world,” had deserted Paul and the gospel [2 Timothy 4:10]. Hymanaeus and Alexander had “made shipwreck of their faith” and thus had been handed over to Satan by Paul “that they may learn not to blaspheme” [1 Timothy 1:20].

In pondering biblical warnings like these, most Christians think of the passages in Hebrews which have spawned so many different interpretations. How are we to understand these warnings – particularly as found in Hebrews 6:4-8? No doubt this is a crucial question, for how we interpret this passage is inextricably tied to larger theological issues – including our understanding of the church itself.

The warnings of Hebrews 6 are seen in the clearest light when put alongside Jesus’ parable of the sower and the soils as found in Matthew 13 and Luke 8. Comparing the human heart to soils of the field, Jesus pointed to the reality that the church would encounter those who would “believe for a while,” but would fall away under testing or persecution. When Jesus identified the shallow soil, he was certainly speaking of those whose faith would be, as described by the Puritans, a temporary or false faith. Thus, those who are described as falling away in Hebrews 6 are those who falsely confessed faith in Christ. As with the soil that bore fruit for a time but withered, so with those who have “tasted the heavenly gift” but fall

away. Theirs was not a genuine and enduring faith, but a fickle and false faith. This is an urgent and sober warning.

In the final analysis, the gift of assurance rests on the biblical doctrine of perseverance. This doctrine teaches that true believers are those who persevere in and by faith. Their endurance – having been preserved by the power of God – becomes the demonstration of their salvation and the mark of authenticity. The biblical doctrine of perseverance corrects misunderstandings implied by more superficial conceptions of the believer’s state. Some teach that anyone who has at any time made a profession of faith in Christ or exercised the slightest belief is secure. These teachers actually argue that true believers may demonstrate absolutely none of the marks of gospel authenticity. In other words, such persons never repent of their sins, and may even repudiate the faith – but are supposed to be secure in their salvation. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Furthermore, the doctrine of perseverance harmoniously links the believer’s assurance of salvation to the larger scheme of redemption. God’s determination to save sinners is affirmed from beginning to end. The believer’s faith in Christ, exercised as an act of the believer’s will, is understood to be itself a gift of God and a result of God’s calling. Thus, the doctrine of perseverance grounds assurance in the eternal purposes of God, by which God determines to redeem his people through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, and to preserve Christ’s church throughout all the ages.

In his first letter, Peter reminded Christians that the Father “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Believers are promised “an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time” [1 Peter 1:4-5]. The Christian’s proper assurance of salvation is God’s gift – a gift given to the believer by the very God who has accomplished our salvation. True believers are those who have genuinely responded to the call of the Gospel, whose belief is evident in a life transformed by God’s grace, and whose profession of faith in Christ is accompanied by repentance from sin and an eagerness to follow Christ.

Believers do sin, and may sin grievously, but they can never finally remain in sin. Peter promised that God will guard his own through faith, even as salvation will be revealed “in the last time.” In the end, the gift of assurance and the doctrine of perseverance take us back to the very essence of the gospel – we are saved by grace through faith. Grace alone . . . nothing more and nothing less.

Weeds and walks

Dandelions, daisies ... continued from p. 15

There. . . Done. Three times (at least) I have been reminded of the value of weeds for wildlife. The first example is not hard for me to remember because I was sitting in my living room on a farm in Surrey, British Columbia, waiting to see if my wife's labour pains were real or a false alarm. Outdoors on November 25, 1977, the weather was horrid – windy, really windy, slanting rain: horrid. As a duck hunter, I thought the weather was great, especially when flock after flock of ducks came pouring into a small 1/4 acre path of weeds that somehow had been missed with the cultivators and herbicide in the summer.

My wife finally said, "Just go! Get out there and shoot some ducks. You're close enough to the house that I can wave a handkerchief or something to tell you if I want you." So, burdened by this onerous command, I hunkered down in my rain gear near the weed patch and shot mallards, returning home after each bird to see how things were progressing. (I was only about 150 metres from the house.) With 200 acres of rotting potatoes, and corn silage to choose from, the ducks chose. . . weeds.

The second and third times involved a winter bird count. The local naturalist club used to call me and ask me to record what I'd seen on our property (located adjacent to a dairy farm). For several years running, I had sightings of song sparrows, not common winter residents where I live. The first time I saw them under the eaves of a deserted loafing barn, and the second time along the edge of an overgrown gravel pit. You can guess what each had in common besides song sparrows: weeds.

Being a fussy vegetable gardener, I just couldn't abide weeds in my garden, but I did make some adjustments. For a few

years, I planted a barley patch in my garden, harvested it by hand and watched grouse discover what pheasants and Hungarian partridge had known for hundreds of years.

I also have a perennial problem area on my yard. Tucked between a barn and a shed and a greenhouse and a hayfield is a small, disused chicken run. We've used it occasionally, but the wire needs replacing, so now I store my canoes there, upside down on sawhorses. And the weeds have a field day. At first, I tried to cut them down with my Weedeater, but finally I just gave up. And the juncos and song sparrows had a field day. They ate in the autumn, above the snow in the winter and again, joined by white-crowned sparrows, when they returned in the spring.

I doubt that many suburban gardens could feature a backyard weedpatch, but natural prairie flower/grass mixes are making a comeback. And for all of us who are just too fussy for anything we didn't plant ourselves, we could plant something as simple as cosmos and let the plants stand through the winter. The birds are so. . . well, bird-brained, that they won't even question whether cosmos are a weed or not. Not everything that grows easily and tastes good is a curse.

Note: Sometimes suburban gardeners and those who live adjacent to farmland often need more knowledge before they adorn their beautifully-landscaped yards with flowering plants. St. John's wort is poisonous to white livestock (and tends to escape) and field scabious (knautia arvensis) is a great butterfly attractor and rangeland invader! Two of my acquaintances intentionally imported tansy ragwort and yellow toadflax. They're still trying to get rid of them.



Walk the road, Mel



But please know from my heart that I am not an anti-Semite. I am not a bigot. Hatred of any kind goes against my faith."

Mel Gibson

Penance is the acceptance of responsibility for repair, and it is one of the most healing things we can do, as well as one of the most painful.

Barbara Brown Taylor

I often feel for the rich and famous. Especially when their most recent foibles are splashed across media outlets all over North America and Europe. That is why I ignored the fuss about Mel Gibson for at least three days. I figured the press was having a hey day and blowing things out of proportion. Sooner or later the real version of what happened would be published and all would be well with Mel Gibson. But it was not to be.

Anyone who has a few humiliating life experiences in the closet will feel some sympathy for Mel. To have one's weaknesses or alleged criminal activity italicized and capitalized in the headlines is embarrassing and mortifying especially if one is seen as the golden boy of the American religious right. Yet, it happens to those who vie for notoriety. Of course, being rich and famous has its perks – especially in the kingdom of film. Salaries skyrocket when one has drawing power. But there is a price to pay. One's life is an open book. On the other hand, it probably was waiting to happen.

Years ago, at the height of the Billy Graham Crusades, a journalist asked the evangelist how he managed to keep his feet on the ground considering the huge success of the crusades. He grimaced humbly and said that whenever he began to feel too big for his breeches God made sure something would happen that landed him face down in muck and mayhem. Now, I don't think God micromanages our lives this way, but Billy made it quite clear that when we begin to feel smug about our success we will do something stupid that forces us to face our weaknesses.

I think Mel may have fallen into that trap. But he has apologized and is in therapy now for 'recovery' or 'rehabilitation' I believe. Yet, I wonder about what that means. To 'recover' means 'to bring back

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

to health.' To be 'rehabilitated' means to 'to restore to good condition.' Both words imply movement towards a *previous* condition that was good and healthy. However, I cannot help but wonder if he was ever in that good and healthy place.

According to the media Mel Gibson was stopped speeding in Malibu with an alleged 0.12 blood alcohol reading, which is several notches above California's legal limit of .08. Upon his arrest Gibson launched into a belligerent expletive-rich monologue, saying "The Jews are responsible for all the wars in the world," and subsequently asked the arresting officer, "Are you a Jew?" It so happened the Los Angeles, County Sheriff's Deputy James Mee, who signed the arrest report is Jewish. In his tirade Gibson also – and this has gone mostly unreported – hurled a derogatory insult of "sugar tits" at the arresting female sergeant. In summary, Mel Gibson's words and behaviors may well suggest he is an alcoholic, a bigot and sexist.

At the same time, drunken behavior is no excuse to use one's mouth as a lethal weapon against ethnic groups or women. Yet, that is how Gibson's behavior is explained to the general public. Furthermore, denial about being a bigot because it is against his faith does not mean he is not one. Words are the voice of the heart and what we say sober or drunk has something to do with our realities.

A local columnist, considering the track record of various celebrities who committed misdemeanours, predicted Mel Gibson would quickly be forgiven and his riches would increase ten-fold over the next few years. And that is the problem with our Christian faith. We are encouraged too quickly to forgive.

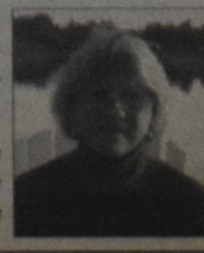
Barbara B. Taylor in *Speaking of Sin: The Lost Language of Salvation* laments that the word "penance" has all but disappeared from our vocabulary. She writes when the Protestant reformers rebelled against certain aspects of Catholic theology and practice, "penance" was the baby that was thrown out with the bath water. All we have left now is sentimental forgiveness and cheap grace. Repentance, according to her, means more than saying "I'm sorry" and that God's grace requires more of us than singing every verse of "Just As I Am." In short, penance is about accepting the responsibility for the deed done as well as for its repair and restitution.

Submitting to this process allows us to be the transformed people we are meant to be. While it may be that Jesus has done the hardest work for us, the reality is we still need to be involved in the consequences of our sin and have a hand in repairing the damage we have done. As Taylor suggests we need to participate in our own redemption, instead of sitting in a lawn chair while Jesus does all the work. We need to be agents of God's grace. How else will others know about God's redemptive power?

There are few things as painful as accepting and living with our personal failures. Yet, our hope lies in learning from them and becoming truly transformed.

We are not at the movies now Mel. Keep walking and let your life speak this time.

Arlene Van Hove is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC. She can be reached at avanhove@shaw.ca



Reflections

From the 11th Province

Marian Van Til

Vignettes from the dog days

It is mid-August as I write this and we're just coming out the other side of the dog days of summer. This column will consist of observations on several disparate topics rather than on one sustained topic. There's a connection between those two things: my failure to develop one particular theme can be chalked up to an expended attention span and depleted mental energy, courtesy of those dog days.

The phrase "dog days" is tied (or leashed, if you prefer) to the constellation Canis major, the big dog, and to Sirius, the dog star. Sirius rises and sets with the sun during the summer, and when it does it is in conjunction with the sun ("conjunction" in this case being a technical astronomical term). The look of the conjunction varies somewhat depending on the latitude one is watching from, but Sirius is so bright at conjunction that in the ancient world it was thought to actually produce some of the hot, sultry weather so common during that time. And it might be added that in the ancient Rome (and Egypt) of the astronomers who observed these things, those days brought not only discomfort but disease, and often, therefore, death.

The dog days encompassed the period from the 20 days before to the 20 days after conjunction. Today, the dog days last only from July 3 to August 11 because the constellations have moved since they were first studied centuries ago. That's due to the procession of the equinoxes, but I won't get into that. I've forgotten most details from the astronomy course I took as my science requirement at Dordt College back in the mid-70s. But I have never forgotten the impact the course and its necessary night-sky observations made on me.

Lovely harbinger of autumn

It is interesting to me to have found out that the dog days end on August 11. I grew up thinking of August as the height of summer and the hottest, stickiest month. I have since observed that that is untrue. The Chicago area, my home until I went off to Dordt, has weather similar to that of the Niagara Peninsula. But without the mitigating influence of a peninsula, and with lake-effect snow from Lake Michigan, Chicagoland is more extreme in terms of both heat and cold. (It also has more, and more spectacular, thunderstorms, and a greater tendency towards tornadoes).

In the last 16 years, beginning when Ed and I bought our first house, and when I renewed my gardening passion, and when we began sitting outside in summer evenings, I began to notice that July is by far the most uncomfortable summer month – by the standards, anyway, of one who cannot tolerate humidity well. But a week or 10 days into August, the weather in this part of the world almost always becomes delightful, as

it is right now: the humidity drops, the days become breezy and less hot, the evenings are cool, the day sky is startlingly blue and the night sky is clear and bright for star-gazing: all of it a lovely harbinger of crisp and colourful autumn to come.

This is the time of year when I begin to get the inclination to reread some of the Psalms, the last chapters of Job, and other Bible passages that so descriptively, picturesquely (and often humorously or even whimsically) exalt God for the innumerable wonders of his creation and his works in it.

Music being so integral to my life, I've noticed I often unconsciously tie what I read in some of those Bible passages to a musical setting. The one that has been going through my head lately is the final chorus of Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, which is a thrilling setting of the first verse of Psalm 8 (KJV): "Lord our Creator, how excellent thy name is in all the earth...." Perhaps I am inadvertently getting mentally prepared for the new Chorus Niagara season which begins after Labour Day. Much to my delight, we'll be singing the complete oratorio at our opening concert on November 3. (Shameless plug: if you live within a couple hours' driving distance of St. Catharines, I invite you to come. I'm confident you'll be glad you did. Not because I'm in the chorus but because *Elijah* is such a moving work, and because our conductor, Robert Cooper – he who produces CBC's choral music programs as his day job – is one of the best in Canada, and that gets reflected in his preparation of our choir.)

'As God the LORD of Israel liveth...'

The oratorio's story covers the major events in Elijah's life. It begins amidst the three-year drought and famine God brings on Israel for its insistence on ignoring him and worshiping Baal. We follow Elijah to the desert and to the home of the widow of Zarephath, where the Lord, through Elijah, both provides food and raises the widow's son from the dead. At the culmination of the drought, we're on the edge of our seats watching Elijah's mighty confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. We then hear of Jezebel's stirring up of the people against Elijah because he helped destroy their pagan prophets. We see his fleeing to the desert where he meets God not in the whirlwind, the earthquake, or the fire, but in the still, small voice. (Elijah's aria "It is enough, O Lord now take away my life" is as poignant and soul-touching as so many of the choruses are exciting and soul-stirring.) And finally, we watch in awe as the fiery chariot and horses take Elijah away to heaven. Well, not quite finally. The oratorio ends with one final acknowledgement of God as the LORD, and as worthy of our praise – that verse from Psalm 8 set to

an exuberant choral fugue accompanied by full orchestra (with lots of brass).

I say we *see* and we *watch* because Mendelssohn's music, coupled with a biblically based libretto by Rev. Julius Schubring, is so dramatic and evocative that the listener surely does see the story unfold. And more, the listener marvels at God's actions in Israel and in Elijah's life. And throughout, we have time to reflect on how God is at work in our own world, the church and our individual lives. (Julius Schubring, incidentally, had previously provided the text for Mendelssohn's first oratorio, *St. Paul*, the musical inspiration for which Mendelssohn got from Handel, the "inventor" of the dramatic biblical oratorio.)

From Judaism to Christianity

Felix Mendelssohn's grandfather, Moses, was a well-known Jewish Enlightenment philosopher and theologian of Judaism, but Felix's parents converted to Christ (thus, undoubtedly, the composer's particular interest in writing an oratorio about St. Paul). Felix's Christian faith was quite real, a fact that these days seems to be an embarrassment to historians and critics and is almost never mentioned. After all, undergirding one's work with one's faith borders on being fanatical; and any god is as good as another. To believe that any religion knows the ultimate truth only leads to the sorry state we're in regarding relations between Christians, Muslims and Jews, those critics would say. In fact, Felix' father's conversion is usually presented as a savvy if now rather distasteful social move. It is presumed that Abraham Mendelssohn, who was a wealthy banker, wanted entrance into the mainstream 19th century Protestant German society that a practicing Jew could never have had.

If you appreciate choral music I highly recommend that you look for a recording of *Elijah* if you don't already have one. Schubring's original libretto was in German, and that's how Mendelssohn set it. But the composer also had connections to England, and the English version has become at least, if not more, popular than the German one.

Richard Hickox's recorded version with the London Symphony and Willard White as Elijah is good, though its tempos tend to the slow side for my tastes (which I think slightly stifles the drama). Paul Daniel conducting the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment and famous Welsh baritone Bryn Terfel as Elijah is very satisfying, and moderately priced for a two-CD set (\$36.99 Cdn at amazon.ca; \$33.98 US at amazon.com). An older recording which I still own as an LP and which is now available on CD, conducted by Raphael Frühbeck de Burgos with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau as Elijah, still has much to recommend it, especially for the price (\$13.99 Cdn at amazon.ca; \$11.98 US at amacon.com;).

If you understand German, conductor Philip Herreweghe's version is very good, with bright, brisk tempos, good soloists and played on period instruments. (My wish is that this one had been in English.) But it's expensive (\$44.99 Cdn at amazon.ca; \$43.98 US at amazon.com). With all of these recordings, however, you can listen to numerous tracks from it before buying if you look them on the Internet at amazon.com.

Wars and rumours of wars

In the dog days one likes to think that the world slows down a bit to catch its metaphorical breath: that it takes a holiday, as it were, as many of us do individually and as families. If that were ever true, it surely hasn't been this summer, as the Israeli-Hezbollah war, the ongoing insurgent strikes in Iraq and increased insurgent hits in Afghanistan clearly show (not to mention increasing societal problems here in North America, some of which are related to the above).

Since I began writing this column a year ago I've never opined about current events. And I'm not sure I will any time soon. That is not because I don't consider them important, of course, but because it seems to be increasingly difficult in our ever more polarized world, even among us Christians, to discuss such events (especially the wars) in a helpful manner that doesn't cause anger, or at least irritation, on one or both (or all) sides. I don't know that anything I say would be helpful; and I admit I'm not keen on being pigeon-holed as either a liberal or conservative because of where I come down on particular issues. I'd like to think that I arrive at my opinions on important matters of our day through careful thought and applied biblical insight. But I suspect that those of you who have quite different views than mine feel you've done the same. So for the time being, my "solution" is not to write anything on controversial world events or subjects. I'll simply continue, for now, to ruminate over what Harry der Nederlanden, John Bolt, Gerald Vandezande, Harry Antonides and others have to say about them.

And now I must to go tend to the newest member of our feline family: a scrawny stray, starving and wounded, who decided one night last week that this looked like a fine place to live. She was quite right. But that is a story in its own right....

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at mvantil@adelphia.net



Event / Business Directory

Frisian family chronicle for emigrants in Canada



Theatre company Tryater performs 'Beppe Tryntsje' for the last generation of Frisian immigrants

Tryater actress Klaasje Postma thought up and wrote Beppe Tryntsje, a moving and familiar theatrical performance about an elderly woman. She wrote down the stories of her 92-year-old mother which have lead to a very successful location production. At first she performed the play at her own farm, Pleats 1812; later on a series of performances took place at the farm of Royal Commissioner Ed Nijpels. More than 80 performances were played, all sold out.

This 'family chronicle' turned out to be a feast of recognition, not only for a lot of Frisians but also for people living outside the Province of Fryslân. Because of the universal character of the play and because of the story of a past generation the idea took form to perform this play (in the Frisian language) in Canada. The Frisian immigrants (the oldest of which will be about 90 years old) are not living far apart from each other and are well organized. This made it possible to organize a tour. At the end of September and the beginning of October about ten performances will be given in the neighbourhood of Ontario.

Klaasje Postma plays a double role in Beppe Tryntsje. She not only plays herself but also the role of her mother. There is a guest role for her husband, actor Freark Smink. Hans Man in't Veld, the artistic director of Tryater, directed the play.

Beppe Tryntsje shows what it means to grow old: the confrontation with contemporary society, the ailments of old age and the mind constantly sliding back to the past. Family trees and old pictures are passing by. The past comes to life again. In the original version, at Pleats 1812 in Wurdum – the farm of Klaasje Postma and Freark Smink – the swallows flew under the roof rafters during the play and there was soup for the audience after the performance.

**See ad on page 23 for locations and times.*



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Classifieds

Anniversary	Obituaries
<p>1966 July 30 2006 Ancaster, Ontario</p> <p><i>Delight yourself in the LORD and he will give you the desires of your heart. Psalm 37:4</i></p> <p>With thanks and praise we celebrate the 40th Anniversary of</p> <p>HERMAN AND MARGARET GEERTS (nee Vanderlaan)</p> <p>Congratulations Mom and Dad! We hope the LORD will bless you for many years to come! We thank you for your love for each other and for all of us.</p> <p>George & Monica – Caleb, Aidan, Claire, <i>Seaforth, ON</i> Linda, <i>Hamilton, ON</i> Jennifer & Conor Brennan – Shaun, Liam, <i>Hamilton, ON</i> Brian & Laura, <i>Brantford, ON</i></p> <p>Address: 24 Gravel Pit Rd RR#3, Dundas ON L9H 5E3</p>	<p>On August 5, 2006 the LORD took home his beloved, faithful child</p> <p>ANDREW (ANDRIES) MIEDEMA</p> <p>He reflected Jesus' gentle, compassionate, and humble nature and Christ's love and concern for the beautiful creation that surrounds us. This was his legacy to his children and grandchildren.</p> <p>Cherished husband for 54 years of Jennie (Bakker) and deeply loved dad and pake of: Tettie Rooke of London Mike & Diana Miedema of Port Stanley Matthew & Laura Miedema Danielle & Peter Reid Patrick Miedema Bernie & Marsha Miedema of Exeter Meaghan Miedema Tyler Miedema Nikki Miedema</p> <p>Funeral services were held on August 10, 2006 at the Exeter Christian Reformed Church, Exeter, Ontario. Pastor Harry Frielink officiated.</p> <p>Correspondence: Jennie Miedema PO Box 94 Pine Lake RR#1, Bayfield ON N0M 1G0</p>
<p>Classifieds</p> <p>DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSION <i>Christian Courier</i> is published on alternate Mondays. Copy deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date. RATE: (GST added to rates listed) All personal and family announcements: \$6.00 per square inch. rose@christiancourier.ca Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: \$8.00 per square inch. email: ads@christiancourier.ca PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of \$25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. Photo space is not charged per square inch but we reserve the right to determine published photo size. We need either an original photo (which we will return) or a downloadable internet image. PERSONAL ADS: <i>Christian Courier</i> would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. The cost to set up a personal file under a unique file number is \$25. Ads requesting correspondence with this file are run at \$8 P.I. per insertion. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened. NEWLYWEDS & NEW PARENTS: We offer a \$25 one-year subscription to couples whose wedding is announced in <i>Christian Courier</i> and to parents who announce a child's birth in our paper. If you want to take advantage of this offer, please let us know when placing your ad. SUBMITTING YOUR AD Mail: Christian Courier fax: 905-682-8313 e-mail: see above 1 Hiscott St St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7 OTHER INFORMATION: CC reserves the right to print classifieds using our usual format and editing style and is not responsible for any errors due to hand-written or phoned-in advertisements.</p>	<p>On Thursday, August 3, the LORD peacefully took</p> <p>MICHIEL OSINGA home in his 77th year.</p> <p>Beloved husband for 47 years of Jenny (vanEngen) Dedicated father of: Irwin & Mary – Stewart, Andrew, Amanda Mark & Lisa – Tristan, Daniel Joanne & Bryan – Nicole, Jennifer, Brendan Brian & Sherry – Joel</p> <p>He will be dearly missed by all who knew him.</p> <p>Funeral Service was held on Tuesday, August 8 at Hope Christian Reformed Church in Brantford.</p> <p>Mailing address: Jenny Osinga 39 Fairmount Ave, Brantford ON N3S 6V4</p> <p>After a courageous eight-week battle with the complications following acute pancreatis, the LORD took unto himself</p> <p>ANN BAARDA in her 67th year at St. Catharines General Hospital on July 9, 2006.</p> <p>Beloved daughter of: Barbara Baarda & the late George Baarda Dear sister of: Chester (Agnes) Baarda, <i>Langley, BC</i> George (Katie) Baarda, <i>Palmerston, ON</i> Cor (Ann) Baarda, <i>Georgetown, ON</i> Eb (Dick) Bokma, <i>Fenwick, ON</i> Frank (Nelly) Baarda, <i>Beamsville, ON</i> Dorothy (Ralph) Janssens, <i>Wellandport, ON</i> Tina (Dave) VanderWier, <i>Wellandport, ON</i> Gerty Baarda, <i>Listowel, ON</i> Ron Baarda, <i>Grimsby, ON</i> Dan (Valerie) Baarda, <i>Beamsville, ON</i> Richard (Sabie) Baarda, <i>Grimsby, ON</i></p> <p>Beloved aunt and great-aunt of 66 nieces and nephews and 56 great-nieces and great-nephews.</p> <p>Funeral was held July 13th at Providence Christian Reformed Church in Beamsville, Ontario.</p> <p><i>My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Psalm 73:26</i></p> <p>Correspondence: Barbara Baarda, RR3 Wellandport ON LOR 2JO</p>
<p>Events</p> <p>DAY OF ENCOURAGEMENT October 21, 2006 Celebrating our God while becoming equipped for ministry. It is an opportunity for all deacons, elders and all other church members to be encouraged, inspired and trained for service. It happens at Hamilton District Christian High School in Ancaster.</p> <p>Theme: Come to the Water Choose from 49 workshops and 15 Service Sites. Cost \$50. Contact your deacons for a registration form or contact Diaconal Ministries at (905) 336-2920. More details are available at www.diaconalministries.com.</p> <p>September 17 3:00 p.m. A DUTCH SERVICE will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church Rev. John Hellinga will be preaching.</p>	<p>On August 5, 2006 the LORD took home his beloved, faithful child</p> <p>ANDREW (ANDRIES) MIEDEMA</p> <p>He reflected Jesus' gentle, compassionate, and humble nature and Christ's love and concern for the beautiful creation that surrounds us. This was his legacy to his children and grandchildren.</p> <p>Cherished husband for 54 years of Jennie (Bakker) and deeply loved dad and pake of: Tettie Rooke of London Mike & Diana Miedema of Port Stanley Matthew & Laura Miedema Danielle & Peter Reid Patrick Miedema Bernie & Marsha Miedema of Exeter Meaghan Miedema Tyler Miedema Nikki Miedema</p> <p>Funeral services were held on August 10, 2006 at the Exeter Christian Reformed Church, Exeter, Ontario. Pastor Harry Frielink officiated.</p> <p>Correspondence: Jennie Miedema PO Box 94 Pine Lake RR#1, Bayfield ON N0M 1G0</p> <p>LUCY (LUTSKE) HOGETERP (nee Visser) March 24, 1921 July 12, 2006 Achum, Friesland Holland Chr. Homes the Netherlands Brampton, Ontario</p> <p>Lucy peacefully graduated to glory in her 86th year. She was devoted to her LORD and to her family. We thank God for her life and we look forward to seeing her again.</p> <p>Predeceased by her beloved husband Peter (1991) and two small children</p> <p>Loved mom, grandma, and great-grandma of: Fran & Fred Spoelstra, <i>Ancaster, Ont.</i> Phil & Chrissy Spoelstra – Elijah, Naomi, Tessa Rachel & Tony De Gazon – Isaiah, Josiah, Elijah Mylana & Ben Goheen Rose & Dave Zimmer, <i>Hebron Ky, USA</i> Erin & Kevin Woiteshek Peter Heather & Nate Verst Kasara Sinclair, <i>Hamilton, Ont.</i> Reta & Dan Marsh, <i>Union, Ky. USA</i></p> <p>Beloved sister of: Metje, Ruurd (predeceased) Jikke, Betty, Frances (predeceased) George & Claire</p> <p>The funeral was held on Friday, July 28/06 at 2 p.m. at the Jarvis Chr. Ref. Church. Rev. H. Praamsma officiated.</p> <p>Correspondence address: Fran Spoelstra 673 Iroquois Ave, Ancaster ON L9G 3B6</p> <p>June 2, 1957 July 25, 2006 Psalm 27</p> <p>EARL JOHN VANDER MEULEN</p> <p>Suddenly, as the result of a farming accident, on Tuesday, July 25, 2006 in his 50th year. The LORD took Earl from this earth, to be in Heaven. His kind, gentle, giving spirit is missed.</p> <p>Loving and faithful husband to Sharon Loving father to Jennifer and Diana Loving son & partner to Jacob & Annie VanderMeulen, <i>Stirling</i> Loving son-in-law to Walter & Una VanderKooy, <i>Belleville</i></p> <p>Loving brother to: Christine & Luke Smit, <i>Wainfleet</i> Evelyn & Sid Tilstra, <i>Woodstock</i> Marlene & Jerry VanHolst, <i>Frankford</i> Liz & Don Muldoon, <i>Brighton</i> Jackie & Michael Niemann, <i>Rockwood</i> Andrew & Jennifer Vander Meulen, <i>Brighton</i> Sharons' siblings, his many nieces, nephews & friends</p> <p>Correspondence: Sharon Vander Meulen, RR#2 Stirling ON K0K 1E0 Jacob & Annie Vander Meulen, RR#2 Stirling ON K0K 1E0</p> <p>SHIRLEY BERGSMA (Bergsma's Paint & Wallpaper)</p> <p>Peacefully at home surrounded by her family at the age of 62, and after a long and courageous battle with cancer, has been taken to her Eternal Home with our LORD and Savior.</p> <p>Loving wife to George, Mother to Jeff & his wife Sara, Arlene & her husband Liam Mackin, Peter & his wife Janine, Doreen & her husband Carel Vandersluis and Yvonne Bergsma.</p> <p>Proud grandmother to Victoria, Emily and Madeline Bergsma; Tiarnan, Ossian, Maeve and one grandson soon to be here Mackin; Elliot and Gavin Bergsma; and Bianca, Carel Jr., and Jackson Vandersluis.</p> <p>Funeral service was held at the Georgetown Christian Reformed Church, on Monday August 7th, 2006. In memory contributions to the Cancer Assistance Services of Halton Hills would be appreciated.</p> <p>To send expressions of sympathy visit www.jsjonesandsonfuneralhome.com Correspondence: 311 Maple Ave, Georgetown ON L7G 1W9 Praise Be To God.</p>

Classifieds / Job Opportunities

Personal

Christian man, 48 (widower) looking for Christian lady for a long term relationship.
Reply to: File 2755
c/o Christian Courier
1 Hiscott St.
St. Catharines ON L2R 1C7

Vacation



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Call: Mary de Jonge
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HOLIDAY IN HOLLAND Self-contained cottage in Friesland. Sleeps four/five persons. Contact sj.kalma@planet.nl

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Contact: Baldwin Verstraete
blverstraete@sympatico.ca
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Event

PRAYER HEALING SERVICE

Saturday, September 23,
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Ministry job opportunities

In anticipation of the retirement of its Chaplain,
Dr. Tom Oosterhuis, as of July 1, 2007,
following 30 years of service in the
CAMPUS MINISTRY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA,
Classis Alberta North is inviting applications
from worthy candidates to fill the position of
Chaplain

The Campus Ministry Committee is seeking a person who is able to engage students, teachers, and researchers in an enthusiastic and articulate manner with a vision of God's mission in Christ and in the light of a Reformed world and life view. We are seeking someone who possesses a genuine love for the academy and is comfortable in giving expression to the Christian faith in an ethnically and religiously diverse international culture. Our Campus Ministry has historically been an integral part of an ecumenical and interfaith endeavor which has ranged from ministering to individual students and faculty to teaching and writing.

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Salary and benefits are commensurate with those of pastors in the Christian Reformed Church and are contingent on experience and academic qualifications.

Please forward a letter of application and resume to

Dr. Leendert Mos, Campus Ministry Committee
email: imos@ualberta.ca
or telephone 780-436-1539 (home),

before October 1, 2006.

Potential applicants are invited to visit the Campus Ministry website:
www.ualberta.ca/~toosterh/



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This position is responsible for the coordination of the church's youth discipleship programs (i.e. Nursery, Sunday School, Youth Group).

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Interested applicants may contact the church office at (905) 528-3826 or email office@firsthamilton.ca for a complete job description or further information.

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Please submit resumes and applications to:

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Attn: Andrew Regnerus
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(Applications must be received by September 30, 2006)

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Aug. 28** Practices start for Liberation choir, 7.30 p.m. Second Christian Reformed Church, McLaughlin and Steeles Ave, **Brampton** ON. E-mail Willem: willem@pianos.ca or Phone Tjitske (905)520 0207 or Lucie (905) 877 8339. www.liberationchoir.com New members needed!
- Sep 11** Practices for Liberation choir, (Burlington area) 7.30 p.m., Crossroads CTS Chapel, North Service Road, **Burlington** ON E-mail Willem: willem@pianos.ca or Phone Tjitske (905)520 0207 or Lucie (905) 877 8339. www.liberationchoir.com New members needed!
- Sep 17** Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. John Hellinga will be preaching.
- Sep 23** **Prayer Healing Service**, 7:00 pm, Meadowlands Fellowship CRC, 211 Stonehenge Drive, **Ancaster**. For details call: (905)528-0353
- Oct 20** Institute of Christian Studies, **Toronto**, invites you to an Academic Convocation. 8 p.m. For info call Robbin at 416-979-2331 ext. 234 (rburry@icscanada.edu) More details, Sep 11 issue.
- Oct 21** **Day of Encouragement** - Celebrating our God while becoming equipped for ministry. It is an opportunity for all deacons, elders and all other church members to be encouraged, inspired and trained for service. It happens at Hamilton District Christian High School in **Ancaster**. Contact (905) 336-2920. See ad page 21 for details.
- Oct 27-29** Hamilton District Christian High School 50th anniversary weekend. For information about activities or to register as alumni: www.hdch.org or 905.648.6655
- Nov 18** **The Lighthouse** Annual Fundraising Dinner and Silent Auction at Villa Colombo in **Toronto**. Reservations required. Call: 416-535-6262

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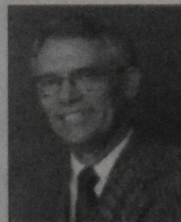
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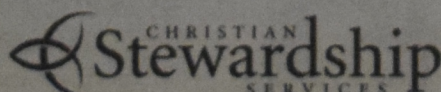
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to 28 sept.	7.00 pm	Holland Christian Homes	BRAMPTON	905-463-7002 ext 262
fr 29 sept.	7.00 pm	Holland Christian Homes	BRAMPTON	905-463-7002 ext 262
wo 4 okt.	7.00 pm	Tollendale Village	BARRIE	705-735-6176
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News

Somalia's refugees stream into Kenya

Refugee camps are strained by a massive influx

DADAAB, KENYA They are arriving in droves, on foot, by donkey, or in matatus – the crowded minibuses that crisscross Somalia's border with Kenya.

Some 18,000 refugees have left their homes in Somalia this year for Dadaab's sprawling city of sticks.

Here they are handed cooking utensils and plastic sheets to fashion a simple shelter from acacia branches.

Some fled Somalia's capital Mogadishu in late May, at the height of clashes between Islamist militias and the city's hated warlords. Others fled later, as the triumphant Islamists began to shut down cinemas showing Western movies, threatened rapists with stoning, and imposed hard-line Islamic law on areas under their control.

Now, with the Islamists strengthening their grip on the country, and the Transitional Federal Government teetering close to collapse, the threat of full-scale war keeps a steady stream of people arriving at this sprawling refugee camp.

"There is not much here, but I came because we heard that the refugee camps were peaceful," says Noorto Ibrahim Hassan, her lips quivering beneath a vivid green hijab that covers her head.

One woman's story

In the shade of her makeshift home, built from plastic sheets stretched over sticks bent into a dome, she explains how she and her family endured the anarchy of Mogadishu for 15 years after the collapse of the country's last functioning government.

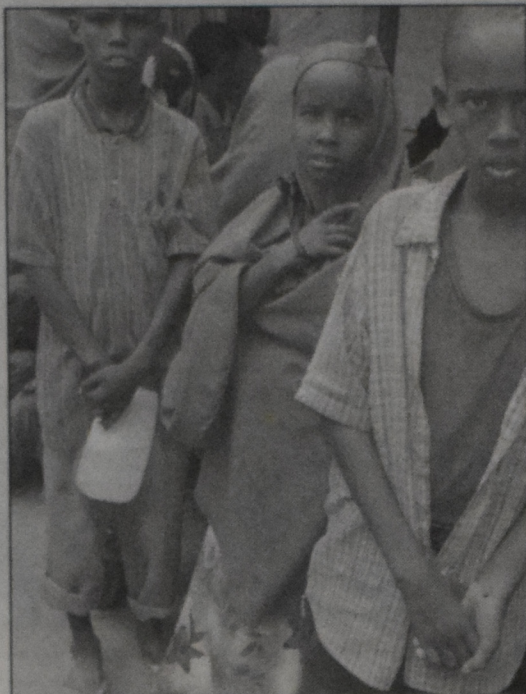
They stayed in after dark and avoided the city's warlord-run roadblocks as much as possible, staying in their own part of town.

But the final straw came in early June, when the Islamists were on the verge of ousting the warlords who had controlled the city for 15 years. Two of her cousins were killed by mortars.

"I felt we just had to leave to escape the bullets and the war, and coming here was the only way to look after my family," she says.

Ms. Hassan left her husband in Mogadishu and walked with her three young daughters for 20 miles before finding a ride on a truck heading south to the Kenyan border.

The Islamists have been accused by the US of harboring Al Qaeda operatives, but closer to home they are credited with bringing peace to Mogadishu for the first time in years.



Children lining up for rations at Dadaab

Many of the refugees tell a different story

Aid workers say the arrivals are dominated by women and children running from violence, as well as boys and young men who fear being drafted into opposing militias.

Mohammed Qazilbash, senior program manager for CARE, the Atlanta-based aid agency that manages the camp, says: "The families that we see arriving are often in quite dire circumstances in terms of both a health and a nutritional point of view, as well as from a trauma perspective."

He is dealing with a worst-case scenario of 100,000 new arrivals this year in a camp already home to 136,000 refugees.

More likely, he says, is that a total of 50,000 will find their way to Dadaab's stick-built shelters – a 20-fold increase in the 2,500 arrivals last year.

Rations have been reduced by almost 10 percent to cope with the influx, and no one is sure how long the wells will continue to provide enough water, creating a "crisis waiting to explode," according to Mr. Qazilbash.

The three sub-camps that make up Dadaab were founded in 1991. The collapse of Siad Barre's brutal government and Somalia's descent into civil war sent the first refugees fleeing into Kenya's barren northern desert, where little more than thorn bushes and bandits can survive.

Aid vehicles travel only with police escorts, and, at night, humanitarian workers retire to compounds protected by razor wire.

Leaving a country on the brink

The refugees leave behind a country on the brink of war.

The transitional government is not

functioning while Prime Minister Ali Mohamed Gedi attempts to build a new Cabinet. President Abdullahi Yusuf dissolved the Cabinet last week following the recent resignation of 40 full and junior ministers. Peace talks scheduled for this week in Sudan's capital, Khartoum, look increasingly unlikely to take place.

And an already volatile situation has been inflamed by the presence of Ethiopian troops on Somali soil where they have been deployed to defend the fragile government.

A Western diplomat in Nairobi, speaking on condition of anonymity, says the result is a tense standoff.

"All three parties would love a fight, but all three parties dare not risk it for the moment," he says.

The Ethiopian troops know that any aggression against the Islamists might unite Somalia's warring clans against a common enemy. Most Somalis have a deep distrust for neighboring Ethiopia, which they see as an expansionist nation that still occupies a part of its territory.

The fragile transitional government knows it lacks the firepower to tackle the Islamists, who have proved to be an adept fighting force.

And the Islamists know that any attack on the transitional government would bring down Ethiopia's military might upon them.

Meanwhile, the Islamists have been consolidating their power and expanding the territory they control. They now control wide swaths of the country's south. Earlier this week, they took the port of Harardhere, some 185 miles north of Mogadishu, and every day there are reports of clan-based militias joining their ranks.

Tuesday, August 15, Islamic militiamen reportedly advanced to Bur Haqaba, a town close to the transitional government's base in Baidoa.

The last time Islamists captured this town, on July 19, troops from Ethiopia crossed into Somalia the following day, prompting the Islamists to withdraw quickly.

With the future of their country hanging in the balance, few refugees have any thought of returning.

"I will be here for as long as the refugee camps are here," says Hassan quietly, as she sits on a reed mat.

The garbage-strewn camps have outlived 14 attempts to find peace in Somalia. No one is expecting them to close any time soon.

Rob Crilly is a correspondent with the *Christian Science Monitor*

News briefs

Congo losing teachers

Here's a new argument against democracy as a cure-all in Africa. The Congo fears it is losing many of its teachers to political office. In Canada and the U.S. the move from teaching to politics would probably not be seen as a rise in status. There have, however, been famous politicians who started as teachers. LBJ started his career as a teacher. But I suspect that many teachers in our culture who switch to politics do so because they're failing as teachers. It's a fallback position. It beats driving a taxi.

In the Congo, however, it's because you're more sure of getting a paycheck. In Canada the teachers unions are so strong, they've seen to it that their paychecks are high on the list of government priorities.

Mothers on welfare

An article in the *Journal of Marriage and Family* reports the findings of a recent research project: mothers who give birth when they are unmarried or who divorce soon afterward spend more time on welfare than mothers who are married and stay that way.

Duh! I wonder how much that study cost. A bit of a no-brainer.

Given that women earn less on average and bear the primary burden for children and that many of the fathers provide little or no support for the children they've fathered, was the outcome of the study ever in doubt? What's the purpose of a study whose outcome is already certain? To demonstrate "scientifically" the benefits of stable marriage? To scare young mothers into staying married? To fill unmarried mothers with despair?

Perhaps not: perhaps it's only to give editors something to put in their newspapers.

On the beach

Aah! The joys of summer. To stretch out on the beach and soak up a little su—sh—sewage?!

After analysing samples of water from 28 beaches along the California coast, that's what the experts have concluded. Those glorious ocean waves rolling in on the beaches are carrying enough fecal matter (human waste) to make you sick.

In fact, they estimate that about 1.5 million swimmers and surfers end up with stomach cramps and diarrhea from snorting up too much of it.

Take my advice, folks: stick to hiking.

Ouch, another skeeter! But don't forget your OFF or the West Nile may get you. And check for deer ticks afterward to avoid lyme disease. Oh, yes, and watch out for poison ivy.

On second thought, maybe the beach isn't a bad idea.

Drink lemonade

If life deals you lemons, make lemonade – and drink it. Lemonade, it turns out, is good for more than cooling off on a hot summer day. It helps to dissolve kidney stones.

Good news for those, like me, whose kidneys are a virtual gravel pit.

After scanning the study, however, I learned that those involved drank two liters of lemonade a day. That's a lot of stops and starts between hither and yon.

Lemonade won't clear up the plaque that causes Alzheimer's, but scientists have discovered the janitor molecules that clean it away. When you get old, the janitorial staff gets lazy. Now the scientists are busy looking for ways to bring those ageing janitors out of retirement.

Before you get too excited, the report says that the discovery was made while working with worms. It might take a while to work up to humans. Mice are next in line for testing.